

A Broken Alpha Heiress' Revenge

[840 words]

Chapter 201

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Third Person's POV

Mr. Duskcliff bared his teeth, fury radiating from every pore. "You arrogant little bitch," he snarled, voice low and venomous. "Don't think walking out of prison means you've escaped justice. You dared to harm my daughter—now you'll pay."

With that, he raised his hand to strike Riley across the face.

Carmen turned her head sharply, horror flashing through her eyes. "If you touch her, I swear I'll rip that hand off!"

But she was too late.

Except... the blow never landed.

Mr. Duskcliff's hand froze mid-air—caught, held immobile by a much larger hand.

It wasn't by his own will that he stopped.

Riley and Carmen both turned their eyes toward the figure behind him.

There stood Lucien Duskgrave, dressed in nothing but a loose black sleep shirt that hung open at the collar, exposing a lean, scarred collarbone and part of his bare chest. His ink-black hair was tousled, and yet he looked like the very embodiment of a highborn Alpha—powerful, untouchable.

His aura hit the room like a storm rolling in over blood-soaked plains.

There was nothing soft about him. Only razor-sharp dominance, the silent snarl of a predator who didn't need to bare his teeth to make you bow.

His deep, silver eyes locked on Mr. Duskcliff, glinting like ice under moonlight.

Mr. Duskcliff grunted, trying to wrench his hand free. The veins in his neck bulged, his face turned a furious red—but he couldn't move an inch.

Then—snap.

Lucien dislocated the arm with terrifying ease.

A sharp scream tore from Mr. Duskcliff's throat as he crumpled to the ground, the limb hanging uselessly at his side.

Above him, the chandelier cast stark shadows across Lucien's chiseled features. He looked down at Mr. Duskcliff as if he were nothing but carrion.

In that moment, the man felt the cold grip of true fear clawing up his spine.

He opened his mouth, trying to stammer something—anything. “L—Lord Duskgrave...”

But Lucien didn't even look at him.

His attention had already shifted—to Riley.

In just a few strides, he was at her side.

Without asking, he took her hand.

The skin was pale, but marred now by angry, red scalding. The porridge had left a painful burn, and small blisters had started

to rise

Lucien's jaw clenched.

He sat her down on the leather couch, his movements quick but careful.

Just then, Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia stepped into the living room.

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The moment the Matriarch saw the burn on Riley's arm, her eyes darkened. “What happened to her?!”

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Mrs. Beck's breath hitched. Since the moment Riley had called her "Mama," she'd treated the girl like her own—gentle, loving, overly protective. A cough, a sneeze—she was always the first to worry.

Now, seeing Riley injured so badly, she nearly lost her composure.

Without a word, she rushed to get the medical kit.

Mia spotted Carmen and blinked. "Carmen? What are you doing here?"

Her eyes then fell to the wreckage on the floor—the shards of shattered porcelain, the spilled porridge, the woman trembling behind the couch, and the blood.

"What happened?"

Carmen didn't hesitate. She told them everything—how Mr. and Mrs. Duskcliff had barged in, how Mrs. Duskcliff had attacked Riley, and how she had defended her.

By the end, Mia's eyes burned with disgust as she turned her glare on the intruders.

The Matriarch's cane slammed into the floor with a thunderous "thud," echoing through the dead—silent room.

"You dare come into my pack's home and lay a hand on my grandson's mate?" Her voice was cold enough to freeze rivers. "You think the Duskgrave name means nothing?!"

Lucien was already tending to Riley's wound.

He cradled her wrist gently in his large hand, his every movement laced with concern and reverence. He applied the salve and bandaged it with tender precision.

"Does it hurt?" he asked, voice soft but taut.

Riley looked up at him, her expression calm, unreadable. She shook her head.

But he could feel her pain anyway. His jaw ticked. A storm brewed behind his eyes.

The room remained still—**so** still that one could hear the faint ticking of the old grandfather clock in the hall.

All eyes were on Riley—Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, Mia, and Carmen. All of them stood like sentinels, encircling her in silent protection.

As for Mr. and Mrs. Duskcliff, they stood off to the side, ignored, humiliated. The icy pressure of the pack's judgment hung over them like a blade.

Ten full minutes passed before Lucien finished tending to Riley.

He closed the medical kit, slowly stood, and lifted his gaze.

Now, he looked at them.

Now, the storm arrived.

His voice dropped low. Dangerous. Controlled. "You better give me a reason I shouldn't tear you both limb from limb."

The fury wasn't loud—it didn't need to be. It was felt. In the air. In the bones.

Mr. Duskcliff's lips twisted. "Lucien—we didn't come to stir up trouble," he growled through clenched teeth. "We came for our son. For Ronan. But when **we** saw her," he gestured toward Riley with venom, "the one who put our daughter in a coma

we lost our tempers."

He spat the next words.

She deserves everything she got"

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A beat passed. Then two.

And then, Lucien smiled.

It was the kind of smile wolves give before they tear out a throat.

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[935 words]

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Third Person's POV

Lady Duskcliff didn't care anymore that her silk robes were torn, her hair wild, or that she looked like a deranged she-wolf dragged through mud. Her eyes burned with desperation as she cried out, "Alpha Duskgrave, that woman is nothing but a cunning little viper! Five years ago, she was just eighteen—and already she tried to kill our daughter!"

Her voice cracked with rage.

"And now she's using some despicable trick to seduce you! You mustn't be fooled!"

"Yes! Exactly!" Lord Duskcliff jumped in, his tone sharpening with indignation. "We didn't hit her for no reason—it was for vengeance, for Tessa! And also for you, Alpha. Think about it—if word gets out that the heir to Stormridge is courting a former inmate... what would that do to your standing?"

The threat in his voice was thinly veiled.

A warning wrapped in concern—if Lucien continued to shield Riley, he would not hesitate to spread the scandal across every Alpha council and political gathering in the continent. Let the world whisper that the Duskgrave heir had fallen for a tainted she-wolf. That he was mated to a traitor.

But Lord Duskcliff had never understood Lucien Duskgrave.

He had no idea that Lucien would rather let the world think he was impotent than let any woman get too close. That Lucien had long since silenced every whisper about his private life with calculated indifference.

He cared nothing for appearances.

And no one—not even an elder Alpha—could threaten him.

Lucien's lips slowly curled into a cold smirk. It wasn't joy. It was mockery, razor-edged and brutal. His silver eyes cut through the Duskcliffs like shards of ice, and his voice was a blade wrapped in velvet.

"Lately, I've been quite preoccupied with our East Ridge development," he said casually. "Almost forgot all about the Duskcliff Group."

At those words, both Lord and Lady Duskcliff froze.

The arrogance, the condescension—they vanished from their faces like melting snow. The color drained from their skin. Their confidence cracked under the weight of dread.

Lord Duskcliff's fists clenched. "W—what are you implying, Alpha?"

Lucien didn't answer. He pulled out his phone from his pocket, elegant **as ever**, and dialed.

He said calmly to his assistant, "begin full-force disruption of Duskcliff operations. Immediately."

The words struck like thunder.

Lady Duskcliff gasped. Lord Duskcliff took a step back as if he'd been physically struck, horror overtaking him.

He couldn't believe it.

Lucien Duskgrave had just declared war over a single woman.

Did he not understand the scale of what he was doing?

The Duskcliff Group had been rooted in Mooncrest for decades—one of the most powerful corporations in the region. Their business stretched across every industry. Their legal, financial, and political reach was **vast**.

But Lucien spoke of toppling them as if he were discussing afternoon tea. Calm. Detached. Certain.

Because he could

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Lord Duskcliff had spent his life navigating the brutal hierarchies of the upper echelons. He knew exactly what the Duskgrave name meant. Stormridge wasn't just a pack. It was a dynasty. Ancient, ruthless, and untouchable. If Lucien gave the order, the pack's allies would move like silent wolves under moonlight—clean, efficient, devastating.

He tried one last desperate appeal. "Alpha Duskgrave, we acted out of love for our daughter! Surely that's something even you can understand. Is Riley worth this—this war?"

Lucien leaned back into the leather couch, his tone laced with dangerous amusement. "Love for your daughter?" he repeated softly, tasting the words as if they were bitter herbs.

“Then perhaps,” he said, “you should be more interested in uncovering the truth, rather than falsely accusing the one person who’s suffered the most.”

Both Duskcliffs stared at him, struck dumb.

“What... do you mean?” Lady Duskcliff asked, her voice brittle with confusion.

Lucien exhaled lazily, like a predator bored with a hunt. “Your daughter, Tessa—she’s awake.”

The words landed like a lightning strike.

Lady Duskcliff blinked rapidly, her breath catching. Lord Duskcliff staggered back half a step. The news left them reeling.

But Lucien wasn’t finished.

He tilted his head, voice silk and steel. “Though it seems your precious son—Ronan—has been hiding her. Perhaps you should visit the holding cells and ask your ‘beloved boy’ why that is.”

Silence.

Dense. Suffocating.

The implications were too clear to ignore.

If what Lucien said was true—if Tessa had woken, and Ronan had kept it hidden—then everything they believed for five years had been a lie. Riley hadn’t lured Tessa into the Black Forest. She hadn’t fed her to the rogues. She had been framed.

And they had punished an innocent girl.

They’d let Riley bleed in prison. Ordered beatings. Set traps. Turned a blind eye to every torment.

The real culprit had gone free.

Lady Duskcliff’s voice broke the silence, wild and unraveling. She shook her head like a madwoman, eyes bloodshot. “No! It was her! It had to be her!”

Lucien’s eyes narrowed, and in them danced a cold, murderous gleam.

“You have one day,” he said flatly, “to bring me the truth. In twenty–four hours, I expect you on your knees, begging for forgiveness at Riley’s feet.”

He stood, casting a shadow over them both. His power roared through the room like a storm wind.

“If I’m satisfied,” he added, “the Duskcliff name remains. If I’m not... then your empire ends.”

His gaze cut like a blade through the room.

And with two final words, he dismissed them.

“Get Out

The guards moved at once, herding the stunned and hollow-eyed Duskcliffs toward the doors.

As they stumbled out into the dark of night, they looked like ghosts—two wolves who had once prowled at the top of the food chain, now shattered and humiliated.

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And behind them, in the Duskgrave estate, the true Alpha returned to his mate’s side. Silent. Watching. Waiting.

Because war had already begun.

Send Gifts

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Finished

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After leaving the Duskgrave estate battered and humiliated, Lord and Lady Duskcliff stopped by Mooncrest General Hospital to treat their wounds. But as soon as the gauze was wrapped and the blood wiped clean, they headed straight to the holding facility where their son, Ronan Duskcliff, awaited his fate.

Inside the reinforced holding sector, the stale air pressed heavily on the lungs. Dim, flickering lights cast long shadows through the iron bars, painting the concrete with broken, uneven lines. The scent of metal, old blood, and desperation lingered like ghosts.

Lord and Lady Duskcliff sat side by side outside the reinforced cell. The thick bars between them and their son felt like more than steel—they were a chasm carved by years of lies, pride, and the irreversible cost of blind vengeance.

Ronan looked nothing like the heir of the Blackmaw pack.

His once-groomed hair hung in tangled tufts. Unshaven, his face bore the shadow of days unwashed. He was gaunt—shoulders hunched, lips dry, eyes sunken. The former gleam of dominance, of cunning confidence, was gone. What remained was a hollow shell.

Even they, who had raised him, had never seen their son so broken.

Once, Ronan had been the pride of the Blackmaw Pack.

Sharp. Charismatic. A natural-born Alpha, Wherever he walked, attention followed. Strength in every step. But now?

Now he looked like a wolf who'd lost his bond to the moon.

Lady Duskcliff's eyes filled with tears. Her voice trembled as she reached toward the bars, as if she could touch him through them.

"Ronan, how are you holding up in here?"

Lord Duskcliff cleared his throat, his voice rougher but laced with paternal pain.

"Don't worry. We'll get you out soon."

But Ronan couldn't meet their eyes.

His gaze was fixed downward, expression right, breathing shallow.

He was terrified they'd ask.

Ask about Tessa.

And of course, they did.

Barely a minute had passed before Lady Duskcliff leaned forward, voice tense with unspoken dread.

“Ronan... tell me the truth. Did Tessa wake up?”

His heart nearly stopped.

He swallowed hard “Ny—she didn’t.”

But his voice cracked. The lie was weak, thinner than air.

Lady Duskcliff narrowed her eyes. She wasn’t a fool “Don’t lie to me. We were just at the Duskgrave estate Lucien said she’s awake—and that she cleared Riley’s name. She said it herself—Riley didn’t lure her into the Black Forest That attack wasn’t her fault.”

Hogan’s face went bone white.

He opened his mouth but no sound came out.

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“Is she awake?” Lord Duskcliff asked, his tone now sharp, direct, Alpha-like. “Is she awake, and did you hide her?”

“I... I didn’t—” Ronan stammered, trying to find an anchor in the flood of panic.

Finished

Even now, he was still trying to protect Scarlett. In his eyes, Scarlett had always been gentle, obedient, soft-spoken—the perfect mate. He couldn’t imagine her capable of leading Tessa into the cursed forest that night, of letting rogues tear into her and leave her comatose.

No. That wasn’t the Scarlett he knew.

So he had stopped Riley from digging into the past. He had hidden Tessa—shipped her overseas under sedation—and locked the truth away.

Because if Tessa spoke?

Scarlett would fall.

And if Scarlett fell... he'd never be able to face Riley again.

Because Ronan Duskcliff loved her.

Even now, even after the prison, the scars, the broken bones. He loved her enough to ache when she averted her gaze. To burn when he saw Lucien stand by her side.

Love, after all, **was** never rational.

It was selfish.

And he was selfish to the bone.

But Lord Duskcliff **saw** through it all.

He had raised this boy. He knew the look in his eyes—the flicker of guilt, the tremble of fear. He knew a lie when it stood trembling before him.

“We’ll know the truth once we check the hospitals,” he said coldly. “You think we won’t find her? You think we’ll just let this go?”

Ronan fell silent.

Because he knew the truth was already slipping out of his grasp.

And when it did—when Tessa pointed to Scarlett **as** the one who had led her to that cursed clearing near the Black Forest, where rogues prowled and shadows whispered—everything would collapse

Scarlett would face prison.

Riley would be proven innocent.

And Ronan? He would lose everything.

He lowered his head pain cutting through every word. “Yes. She’s awake.”

The admission cracked the silence like thunder.

Lord and Lady Duskcliff froze.

Relief and dread surged in equal measure.

Their daughter their precious pup—had survived. But that also meant. Lucien had told the truth And everything they had done to Piley—every punishment, every smear, every act of cruelty—had been for nothing.

No, worse than nothing

They had hurt the wrong girl

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Let the real threat walk free.

Lady Duskcliff's lips parted, but she couldn't speak. Her throat was tight. Her eyes burned.

She stared at her son through the iron bars, disbelieving.

Ronan lowered his head even further, no longer able to look at either of them.

He had betrayed Riley.

He had lied for Scarlett.

And now, everything was falling apart.

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Lord Duskcliff drew a steadying breath, forcing calm into his voice before asking again, "Then tell me—Tessa didn't say Riley was the one who harmed her?"

Ronan Duskcliff's face turned pale. Memories flooded back: the chaos in the hospital, Riley's desperate attempts to declare her innocence, the confusion in her eyes—her grief

as deep as a fresh wound. He had ignored it all, even stopping Tessa from naming Scarlett as the assailant.

That image still throbbed in his chest, and guilt had become a physical ache.

Ronan's voice emerged fractured and burdensome, every syllable drenched in regret. "No... it wasn't Riley."

Lady Duskcliff's eyes narrowed. "Then who?" she demanded fiercely. "Who had the heart to guide Tessa to the frost? If she hadn't been strong, she would've died!"

Ronan remained silent. He'd grown up beside Scarlett; he knew her well enough to be certain she would never do such a cruel thing. It was more likely Tessa had slipped by accident—Scarlett never intended harm. And as for Riley... what had Riley even gained from confessing? She would have spent five more years behind bars, and yet she bore the weight without complaint.

The truth Ronan buried wasn't Riley's silence—it was everyone else's deception: Kael Vale fabricating evidence, the luna Zara of the Ebonclaw Pack deleting critical footage, Maddox—his own defense attorney—spinning lies, and Ronan himself refusing Riley a chance to speak her truth.

All of them had pushed her into the abyss.

Yet now, he blamed her for refusing to clean that abyss.

"Why won't you tell us?" Lady Duskcliff shrieked, her voice raw with betrayal.

Ronan stared down at the floor. He couldn't speak.

Seeing Tessa—a fragile girl, fragile for five long years—held in hospital beds, bits of herself fading after each day... the rage in Lord Duskcliff's heart boiled over. He lurched forward, slipping his fingers through the irons and grabbing Ronan by the

collar.

"Tell me! Tell the truth—who did this?" Lord Duskcliff demanded, eyes wild with anger.

Ronan's silence only stoked the flames further.

Then Lord Duskcliff struck. A flurry of blows rained down, each slap branded with the weight of the family's broken heart.

"You ungrateful pup!" he hissed. "Do you even care about your sister?"

“You know how much your mother and I fought just to keep you alive—ridiculed in the presence of the Duskgrave family—only because of you!”

“Alpha Lucien **gave** us one day. One day to prove the truth—or the Duskcliff name collapses!”

Lord Duskcliff spat the words through clenched teeth “And you still won’t speak!”

Tears streaked down Lady Duskcliff’s face as she joined her husband, her voice trembling **between** mourning and pleading “Boman. if you can tell me who did this.. just tell me where Tessa

Ruman lowered his head further, grief and shame clashing in his eyes. Finally, his voice emerged ragged and hollow “Tessa. I want her to see me again **in** M land”

The words echoed like a death knell

“Tutor Lord Duskcliff spat dropping his son. “Tessa is your blood she wakes after. Bve your want yours you send her away! Do you even have a heart!

He stood where his sun, towering with fury “You need to pray she’s safe Because if anything happens to her it won’t be past

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the Duskcliff name that dies. It’ll be you.”

Without another word, he turned to Lady Duskcliff.

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“Come. We go get her. I will look her in the eyes and ask... who dared harm my cub. And they

will pay.”

Send Gifts

Finished

Side by side, Lord and Lady Duskcliff—crossed the courtyard toward the waiting carriage, their rage burning hotter than the forged steel of Stormridge’s pack gates.

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Ronan Duskcliff stared at the retreating backs of his parents, despair slowly drowning his eyes like an approaching storm.

“Scarlett didn’t mean to... I swear,” he murmured to himself.

His legs gave out, and he slumped onto the cold iron bench, arms limp at his sides, eyes clouded with disorientation. Even now, he couldn’t understand how everything had spiraled this far out of control.

He had always believed he was protecting the pack—maintaining order, soothing Riley’s growing hatred toward Scarlett.

But in trying to suppress the fire, he had only fed it. Now Riley loathed him more than ever. And that lunatic Lucien Duskgrave was openly targeting him.

He was supposed to be the heir of the mighty Blackmaw Pack, the next Alpha of a legacy built in blood and honor. Now he sat caged like a rogue.

His brows tightened further. If Riley hadn’t stirred up trouble at Matriarch Duskgrave’s celebration, none of this would’ve happened. He and Scarlett would still be safe, untouched.

But that woman... five years in prison had stripped her of all the softness he once remembered. She’d become cold, unpredictable.

He couldn’t know—couldn’t possibly imagine—how much shame would come with that belief once Tessa returned and the truth shattered everything he thought he knew.

Every thoughtless word he had spoken in Scarlett’s defense... every silent betrayal of Riley... would become knives. Knives that would drive deep into his own heart—relentless, merciless.

And the guilt... would be eternal.

Even if he fell to his knees one day, begging Riley for forgiveness, she wouldn't even spare him a glance.

That kind of indifference—of being discarded like nothing—would be worse than death itself.

And yet, even now, Ronan Duskcliff clung stubbornly to his version of the story. As if none of it had been his fault.

At the Duskgrave Estate, all eyes were locked onto Riley.

Not a soul in the room tried to hide their concern. Even a minor burn on her wrist had sent a wave of unease rippling through the high-ranking wolves of the Stormridge Pack.

Matriarch Duskgrave gripped Riley's wrist gently, her old but steady hands trembling with worry. "Lucien," she said firmly. "take her to the pack infirmary. Now."

To Riley, such warmth was foreign. Bewildering

But oh, how she longed to stay wrapped in it.

The genuine concern, the affection that didn't demand something in return it seeped into the deepest cracks of her heart, tempting her to believe just for a moment—that she could belong here. That perhaps the rest of her life could be spent near dus fiercely protective Matriarch and Lucien

But logic—cold and ruthless—struck back like a bucket of ice water.

Riley know

ties she knew what datriarch Dusk grape truly waited for her to bond with Lucien. But Kiley's body, her soul had bera fractured beyond repair. She was no longer a whole woman, no longer a worthy make

She can't be so sritish She condida can someone like Lasien Dakgave to the ribs of a dying wolf

She poorly pulled back her act and spoke with quins sisty, "Me I've already treated the torts. It's nothing versus, tudy Plewer, dar trouble your

Bus the sides would rebandum panded 14 wilver brows And gether "But as a child, If i was you

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regret not treating it properly. And your health—goddess above—we still haven't done a full diagnostic since your release. You're too thin. Pale. We must get it done.”

Ever since learning of the horrors Riley endured in prison—her injuries, the fact that she'd lost a kidney—Matriarch Duskgrave had made Riley's health her constant worry. But the affairs of the

ne Pack had delayed her plans again and again.

Now that Lucien was finally home, she was determined not to wait any longer.

Riley's eyes flickered with unease.

Tent through with those tests... the scars, the damage, the truth about

She knew the Matriarch's concern was real. But if they her hearing loss—none of it could remain hidden.

And she didn't want them to see her as weak. As a burden.

”

She didn't want to disrupt this fragile peace, this beautiful illusion that she still had a place in their world.

“I promise... I'm fine,” she said, firmer this time, her expression unwavering.

Matriarch Duskgrave exhaled heavily, finally nodding—though her eyes remained stormy with reluctance.

She reached out again, brushing her thumb gently over Riley's hand with motherly tenderness. “If anything hurts—anything

at all—you must tell me immediately, do you understand? You don't have to bear it alone anymore.”

Riley nodded obediently. But her gaze dropped to the floor, veiling the shimmer of tears that had welled in her eyes.

She would not let the Matriarch see her cry. She would not let this precious kindness become a burden for those who had given her sanctuary.

When she raised her head again, the tears were gone—swallowed by a resilient, gentle smile that warmed the hearts of those around her.

Send **Gifts**

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Riley's gaze swept slowly across the room, lingering on each face.

In their eyes, she saw nothing but sincerity and compassion.

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For the first time in a long while, a warmth bloomed quietly in her chest. In that fragile, fleeting moment, she dared to believe that perhaps the Moon Goddess hadn't been entirely cruel to her.

Yes, fate had dealt her a bitter hand—born to a bloodline that abandoned her, cast into the cold shadows of pain and falsehood—but still... she had found this. A circle of people who treated her with unguarded kindness.

And that warmth—so rare, so precious—was enough to shield her from the coldest winds of the world.

A radiant, genuine smile broke across her face—like sunlight after a long storm.

Golden light spilled through the tall windows of the Duskgrave estate, casting a soft halo around her. The morning sun kissed her skin, bathing her in a gentle glow that made her look impossibly serene—healthy, even.

Matriarch Duskgrave watched her with a loving gaze. "You must be hungry, child. Come, I'll make breakfast with Mrs. Beck and Mia."

She didn't wait for Riley's polite refusal—she simply rose to her feet and left with a decisive warmth, calling out to Carmen cheerfully, "Come sit, dear. Spend some time with her."

The grand sitting room fell silent, leaving only three behind—Riley, Lucien Duskgrave, and Carmen.

Carmen's thoughts were a storm—churning with urgency, anxiety, and questions. But Lucien's presence was like an invisible mountain pressing down on the room. Regal, commanding, effortlessly dominant. The air around him hummed with power.

She opened her mouth—but the words died before they reached her lips.

Her eyes flicked toward Riley and quickly looked away again. Then she smiled sweetly and said, "Riley, I saw the garden outside earlier—there are so many beautiful blooms. Will you come walk with me? I'd love to see them up close."

Kiley, unsuspecting, rose to her feet with a gentle laugh and took Carmen's arm. "You'll love them. Alpha Lucien had them specially selected and planted—each flower chosen for its bloom cycle and scent."

There was a lightness in her tone—a subtle lift, unintentional but clear. She didn't say she adored him, didn't fawn. But in her words was a quiet admiration that could not be missed.

Carmen's chest tightened.

She glanced sideways at Riley's soft expression, at the light flush on her cheeks, and her heart clenched with worry.

Could it be Riley had fallen for him?

Lucien Duskgrave was no doubt remarkable—powerful, composed, devastatingly handsome—but Carmen's instincts screamed danger.

She dared a glance at the man himself.

He was seated, one leg crossed over the other as he watched the two when Not moving. Not smiling.

But watching.

A predator waiting in the shadows.

Carmen stilled. Thock was like a panther tracking prey. She forced herself to breathe evenly, but her heart pounded.

When they surged in the garden, did that oppressive weight tally?

Carmen released a shaky breath, feeling scary. Dangerous. That man was dangerous. The Kid said who once marked.

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Before she could dwell on it further, Riley was already leading her between bursts of color. The flower beds stretched across the courtyard like a tapestry of wild beauty—lavender, moon—roses, sunthorn lilies, and nightshade bloom mingled in striking harmony. Their scents wove together into something so heady and lovely it made Carmen briefly forget where she

was.

Then, she stopped.

“Riley,” she said softly, voice grave.

Riley turned, surprised by her serious tone. “What is it?”

“Do you want to leave this place?” Carmen asked, eyes filled with urgency and hope.

Riley didn’t answer immediately. Her smile faded, replaced by quiet contemplation. A long silence settled between them, heavy with emotion.

Carmen grew more anxious by the second.

“You asked me once—at the hospital—if I’d ever thought of studying abroad. I didn’t give you a real answer then, but I’ll give you one now: Yes. I want to go. I need to go. But not without you. I want to leave this place—with you and my mom. We could start over. A new life. One where the Ebonclaw Pack, the Duskcliffs, even Maddox—they won’t be able to hurt you ever again.”

Carmen looked around, lowered her voice, and added, “I know the Duskgrave family has been good to you. I see that. But Riley... those highblood families, they come with rules. With power plays. And that man... Alpha Lucien... he’s not just some kind aristocrat.”

She locked eyes with Riley.

“He’s dangerous.”

Riley had been watching her intently the whole time, lips pressed together, reading every word that passed from Carmen’s mouth.

She knew.

She knew Carmen spoke from the heart.

And she also knew Carmen wasn't wrong.

The Duskgrave family owed her nothing. She had no blood ties to them. Matriarch Duskgrave's matchmaking efforts were gentle but unmistakable. And Riley... was painfully aware she didn't belong here forever.

Lucien Duskgrave was brilliant Imposing. A king among wolves.

And she—scarred, maimed, half—healed—was little more than a shadow of what she once was.

He deserved more. Better.

Not someone like her, broken in both body and soul

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[837 words]

Chapter 207

Riley knew her condition all too well.

She didn't have much time left.

So why drag Lucien Duskgrave into the pit of her inevitable ending?

W

Finished

There was no reason to entangle someone like him—an Alpha born under a silver moon, destined for greatness—with someone like her, flickering like a dying ember.

“I understand, Carmen,” she said softly, her voice carrying a depth of clarity that only those who had made peace with death could possess.

Carmen's eyes lit up immediately. “Then... you'll come with me?”

Upstairs. The embroidery room.

The view of the garden below was perfect from here—intentionally so.

Lucien had insisted the embroidery room be placed right above the garden. He'd said that when Riley grew tired of stitching, she could rest at the windowsill and breathe in the rich fragrance of the flowers below, the scent and view soothing her spirit.

Now, Lucien Duskgrave stood lazily against the open window, his tall frame outlined by the gentle light of the overcast sky. His eyes followed every movement in the garden below—every step Riley took, every word she shared with Carmen.

He listened.

The shadows in his eyes deepened, and his brow arched slightly in intrigue.

Well well... Mia certainly raised a sharp one, he mused, a faint smirk tugging at his lips.

He had expected Riley to be approached by unworthy males with hidden intentions.

He hadn't expected Carmen to be the one to whisk her away.

Still, there was no fury in Lucien's posture. He remained utterly calm—almost entertained—as he listened.

Then came Riley's answer:

"I'll go with you"

Carmen gasped "Really?" she whispered in disbelief, joy spreading across her face like sunrise. She rushed forward and hugged Riley tightly, unable to hide her excitement. "When do we leave? Tomorrow? I'll book the flight right now."

Riley couldn't hear Carmen's words, but she could read her lips and feel her emotions.

Sull, she gently stepped back from the embrace, her gaze soft but unwavering.

"I said I'll go. BuL."

Carmen froze, sinile faltering. "But what?"

Riley hesitated. Her voice was lower now, hesitant, Isurdened I promised Alpha Lucien, I promised I would finish the Elegy of Putties for Matriarch Duskgrave"

Stir luwred her eyes, guilt casting a shadow over her features. He spent twenty million credits to win the piece at her birthday aucun and because of my mistake Scarlets alreded it I need to make it right."

Cummin's barath caught

had heard **about** the **incident** in on the full co

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355 PM pp.

Chapter 207

#2

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"And Lucien Riley added, her voice barely above a whisper, "He saved me When I had no one, when I was ready to end it all—he was there. That night when Gu Yilin woke up, I was ready to jump I would have, if he hadn't shown up"

She didn't mention the two million credit vintage whiskey she'd drank out of spite. Or the hospital bills be quietly paid afterward.

Every kindness. Every debt.

She carried them all

Carmen's fists clenched as she swallowed a rising lump in her throat. She had never known Kiley had come that close to death

If Lucien Duskgrave hadn't been there

She didn't dare finish the thought.

Quietly, she asked, "Then after you finish repaying him, will you come with me?"

Riley's answer came with a gentle smile, "Yes"

She had her skill now—Moonwave embroidery, a dying art reborn in her hands. That alone could sustain her in any country, in any city. Even across the sea, she would not fall to ruin again.

Above, Lucien listened without moving, the smirk never leaving his face. His gaze was unreadable—like a lake at midnight, hiding what swam beneath.

So, you've made your plan, little flower.

You intend to vanish.

But did I ever say you could leave me?

His grandmother had already accepted Riley as her future granddaughter-in-law.

And the ring on Kiley's finger—the one his mother once wore was not a simple gesture.

It was a vow

You are mine, Kiley, Oath-bound Soul touched. No one walks away from me.

sull, Lucien made no move to confront her. He didn't need to.

Let her try to run

He'd rather see her realize on her own that even if she fled the Stormridge Pack, even if she crossed oceans—her heart would find its way back to him

The next morning

Rain whispered against the windows of the Duskgrave estate, soft and steady, like a lullaby from the clouds. The gray sky filtered through the glass casting a dim gentle light over the polished floors and quiet halls

Riley stirred from sleep he senses adjusting to the rhythm of raindrops and the muted hum of the estate awakening

she moved through her morning routine with quiet grace Washed Dressed Descended the grand staircase for breakfast where warmth and comfort would be like old friends.

As he took the head sip of his tea where to return to Shur Detyrus, she was already focused on thread and will

Bin pot dar erved.

Warm larung Persi

3:55 PM P P .

Chapter 207

Wrapped tightly around her wrist.

Riley froze.

That touch—searing and electric—ignited every nerve

senses.

5

Finished

in her body. Her heart leapt violently in her chest as heat flooded her

She turned, eyes wide with confusion and disbelief, and found herself face-to-face with the storm.

Lucien Duskgrave.

His eyes, silver-flecked and dangerously calm, bore into hers.

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[806 words]

Chapter 208

Riley's POV

Finished

Lucien Duskgrave's lips parted slightly, and the sound of his voice rolled through the air—low, magnetic, edged with the kind of dominance only an Alpha prince could wield.

“Riley. Sit.”

My heart skipped a beat.

That one word—Riley—landed differently now. He didn't call me Miss Vale anymore. Somewhere along the way, the distance, the formality. What replaced it was something warmer.... and far more dangerous.

he'd

Every time he spoke to me now, it was with intention. He never let me hide. Always brought at him.

me closer. Always made me look

I swallowed. “A—Alpha Lucien... ‘ is something wrong?”

He didn’t look away. “Ronan Duskcliff’s parents just arrived—with Tessa.”

The room went

still.

Thunder couldn’t have hit harder.

I felt the blood drain from my face, my lungs freezing mid—breath. After all these years—five years of silence, of waiting, of enduring—the moment had finally come.

Caelum had already uncovered the truth. I had the facts. The evidence. But none of it mattered... not until Tessa said it aloud.

Tessa. The girl whose silence sentenced me.

She was the only one who could free me now—with words that should’ve been spoken five years ago.

Lucien’s hand found mine, grounding me. I let him guide me down beside him on the long leather sofa, my pulse drumming like war in my veins.

He turned his head, voice calm and command absolute. “Mrs. Beck. Open the gate. Let them in.”

Outside, past the wrought—iron fence of the Duskgrave estate, I knew they were already standing there.

Lady Duskcliff. Lord Duskcliff. Soaking in the cold rain.

Tessa sat between them.

They didn’t run Didn’t knock Didn’t beg.

They just stood there, letting the storm hit them, as if that could somehow wash away the blood on their hands.

I’d imagined this day a hundred times. A thousand. But not once did I picture them looking so... hollow.

Tessa sat in her wheelchair—pale, quiet, stripped of all that arrogance she once wore like a crown Now, she looked like someone who had finally seen the wreckage of what she’d done

Mrs. Beck opened the door. Her voice was calm, powerful. You may come in

The Duskefly jolted. As if her words carried more **power** than any alpha's howl

and you say did more

Just yesterday they were ready to shamar or again To strip me bars of diguay. Itury were still certain I was the villain

Now!

3:55 PM P P .

Chapter 208

Finished

Now they knew.

I hadn't hurt Tessa.

I hadn't lured her into the Forest that night.

I hadn't left her to bleed out under the claws of a rogue wolf.

And I certainly hadn't earned the five years of torment they saw fit to deliver.

Tessa's eyes flicked to her parents. Her voice, when it came, was steadier than mine would've been. "Let's go. We owe her that much."

She wheeled herself inside.

Lady and Lord Duskcliff followed like ghosts, their shadows stretched long and broken behind them.

When they finally stepped into the living room—and saw me, sitting tall and still at Lucien's side—it was like the floor was ripped out from under them.

They dropped to their knees.

Two Alpha-born wolves.

Kneeling.

"For what we've done..." Lord Duskcliff said, his voice cracking, "Riley, we are sorry."

Lady Duskcliff sobbed. "We thought you hurt Tessa.. We were wrong... So wrong.."

Tears ran down her face, soaking the collar of her coat. She looked older. Frailer. Like time itself had punished her in my place.

Maybe it had.

But even then—it wasn't enough.

Not for what I'd endured.

I looked at them. My voice was steady, but there was fire beneath it.

"A single apology?" I asked. "Is that all you brought me?"

The silence was suffocating

"Do you think that makes up for what happened to me in that prison?"

I stood slowly, the words clawing their way up my throat. "Every day, I was slapped. Forced to kneel. Forced to drink **toilet** water like an animal. They stabbed me. Beat my legs until my bones shattered"

Lady Duskcliff whimpered.

Lord Duskcliff's head dropped even lower

I didn't stop

"Do you want to know who paid the guards to do that? Who bribed the inmates to make my life hell I stared directly at Trosa. To talved Alpha Daskchiff And your baber Konan"

Leckerbites were white fists clenched tight at his sides

They even stole a kidney and for," I used "I went in brady Song Full of dreams. And i came out half check"

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Chapter 208

I could feel my voice breaking, cracking with years of buried pain. “And now you think a single ‘sorry’ will fix that?”

I turned away. The tears in my eyes weren’t weakness. They were fury—burning, vengeful, and pure.

“You destroyed me,” I whispered. “All of you.”

“And you’ll carry that with you for the rest of your lives.”

Lucien’s hand found mine again, warm and firm. “You don’t have to forgive them,” he said, his voice low and rough.

And I wouldn’t.

Not today.

Not tomorrow.

Maybe not ever.

Because some wounds weren’t meant to heal.

And some scars were meant to be seen.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[932 words]

Chapter 209

Finished

Third Person’s POV

Each word from Riley Vale fell like a stone, and with every accusation, Lord and Lady Duskcliff looked as though the weight of a mountain had been dropped onto their shoulders.

Their faces turned even paler, lips trembling, desperation clawing at their throats as they instinctively tried to defend themselves. But the words never came—choked back by the cruel, inescapable truth.

Because the truth was this: Riley's permanent injuries were no accident.

They had ordered it.

They had orchestrated her suffering from the shadows.

And now, guilt clawed through their bones, devouring them alive. All they could do was look at her—eyes pleading, full of regret—as if praying she might give them one final chance.

But forgiveness was not something Riley granted to those who had carved their names into her pain.

The damage was done. No matter how sweetly they worded their remorse, no apology could erase the five hellish years she had survived behind bars.

She was here, alive, sitting in front of the very wolves who had sentenced her to rot—not because of their mercy...

...but because of her own unbreakable will.

She had clawed her way through blood and torment, refusing to die beneath a false conviction.

She had lived for this moment. For the truth.

For vengeance.

She wanted every lie burned away under moonlight. She wanted every coward and conspirator to be exposed. She wanted the ones who protected Scarlett Vale to feel their regret like a dagger twisting in their gut,

And so, as Lord and Lady Duskcliff wept and begged for her forgiveness, Riley remained cold as winter frost.

Without a flicker of hesitation, she reached down and rolled up her pant leg.

The room **went** still

There, in the quiet glow of Lucien Duskgrave's estate, her disfigured leg **was** revealed.

"This ing" she said, her voice low and calm—too calm, "was shattered during my third year in prison"

Her left hand was twisted grotesquely, bones healed without alignment. A monstrous scar stretched across her skin, dark red and raised like a bloated centipede wrapped around her calf—ugly and cruel

“They broken with six iron rods And no one gave me treatment. I screamed. I bled, I writhed on the floor while the guards laughed. While the other mummies watched **me** suffer like **an** animal”

The story's her voice deepened.

“I **to** three and for it to begin bracing Without a doctor Without even **a** splint.”

Lord Dusk collapsed back to **the** ground, **as** if her words had struck harm in the bears Lady Dusk had let out a broken wail so the tartan for

became a huge glass at Kibry's leg revealed the 4th tones had never been at The Bature had fused unevenly layers of dirt what was wrapping and the damage lars gustempat vary

“Ruby Lady Druskos base with tears web we was a We er hent expect forgiveness as frust bet is

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Chapter 209

Finished

atone. Please.”

She dropped to her knees and lowered her head, slamming her forehead into the floor in a painful, echoing thud. Her sobs tore through the room.

“Just give us a chance to pay for what we've done.”

Even Lord Duskcliff's eyes were bloodshot, glassy with tears he could no longer hold back.

And Tessa—Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack—stood frozen, tears spilling freely as she stared at Riley's leg. Her voice trembled.

“Riley... it's my fault. If it hadn't been for me, none of this would've happened. I'm the one who should be begging for your forgiveness.”

Riley closed her eyes for a moment, breathing in deep, dragging the centuries—old rage back down into the cage of her chest.

“No,” she said, opening her eyes. “You’re not the one I blame. You’re a victim too.”

She looked at Tessa, her voice heavy.

“But I need to know—on the day of Scarlett’s Ascension Banquet... what really happened?”

Tessa’s hands curled into fists at her sides. Mention of Scarlett Vale lit a blaze of fury behind her eyes, but when she looked back at Riley, her expression was only sorrow.

“She was my best friend,” she said bitterly. “And she tried to kill me.”

The room was silent but for the sound of rain beyond the windows.

Lucien stood still, jaw clenched. Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia looked stunned and pale. Even they hadn’t heard what had truly happened that night.

And as Tessa spoke—describing the events of that cursed night five years ago—Lord and Lady Duskcliff, despite having already learned the truth, could not stop trembling.

The facts were undeniable. And they were horrifying

Scarlett Vale and Alpha Alaric had not planned for Tessa to be harmed that night.

Their original target... had always been Riley.

Their plan had been to stage a grand “accident” during the banquet. To injure Riley publicly—severely enough to justify a hospital transfer.

Once there, no matter the extent of her injuries, the Ebonclaw Pack’s plan was to declare her brain—dead.

Alpha Alaric, as her legal guardian, would then sign the organ donation forms himself

Their goal?

To harvest both of Riley’s kidneys for Scarlett

And it didn’t end there

Her heart. Her liver Her eyes. Every viable organ would’ve been stripped from her body—while she was still technically alive.

Kiley sat fruar

titan trad always saxpected that Scarlet and Alpha Alaric were after her kidney. But this thus was something else

This was stupider maparrading as tragedy.

That was premeditated murder

Lier hands tredded fixen *fra* fran rage that pudest like lava itwough ber YENIA.

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3:56 PM P P .

Chapter 209

Finished

She looked at Lucien, whose eyes were molten gold, barely holding back the beast inside him. His claws had unsheathed.

Lady Duskgrave stood in silence, expression like carved stone.

Mrs. Beck covered her mouth.

Mia wept.

No one in the room spoke.

Because what Scarlett and Alpha Alaric had done...

Was monstrous.

And Riley?

Riley was supposed to be their sacrifice.

Their offering.

Their spare parts.

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[683 words]

Chapter 210

Riley's POV

Finished

Alaric's ambition knew no bounds. He didn't just want my kidneys—he planned to donate my entire body after death, have me laid out on some cold slab as a cadaver for medical students, wrapped in the lie of altruism.

And the timing was perfect for his performance. That night—Scarlett's Ascension-

there. Every Alpha, Luna, Beta, and councilman witnessed it firsthand: Alpha Alaric the entire Mooncrest elite was

His daughter, Scarlett, would be saved from kidney failure.

He'd be lauded as a hero.

A "noble father." A "philanthropic Alpha."

"selfless

sacrifice."

His image would skyrocket, and the Vale Group's grip over Mooncrest would tighten. The shareholders would eat it up- every drop of it. Then he'd turn that favor into pressure. Use them to force Luna Zara into handing over her shares.

Once he had that, once the pack's heart and finances were under his thumb, he could break her mind, piece by piece. And the world would only pity him more—a tragic, devoted mate who stood by his Luna through her descent into madness.

Eventually, she would die.

And Elira Blackthorn—Scarlett's mother—would take her place at his side.

Kael? He was never part of the endgame. Talented or not, Alaric planned to cut him out completely. Every drop of inheritance would go to Elira, Scarlett, and the bastard child he kept overseas.

Kael would work himself to the bone for the Vale name... and never see a single coin for it.

That was the brilliance of Alaric's scheme—five birds with one blood-soaked stone:

Save Scarlett.

Become a legend.

Shatter Zara.

Claim Elira.

Erase Kacl.

And the best part? I was supposed to die for it.

It would've worked too—if not for Tessa

That night the banquet was crowded beyond belief. She hated the press of bodies, the scent of wine and sweat, so she snuck upstairs to find an empty restroom.

She wasn't meant to bear anything

But she did

Every word

Scaricu Alary. Their whispered plan to lead me to “accidental brain death, sign off the paperwork, and carve my busty sport in trupi of the whole damo cary under the banner of science and sacribire

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She pushed

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Chapter 210

Finished

Scarlett noticed.

And so, Tessa had to die.

Scarlett lured her into the Black Forest with some excuse, some sweet lie—and when they got deep enough, the Rogues sprang the trap. She'd had them waiting there for

hours. It was Elira who covered the scene, dousing the air in a rare alchemical tincture to mask the real scent trail... and redirect it to me.

Everything would've gone as planned, if Tessa hadn't dropped that earring.

A limited edition one—Kael's gift.

And if they hadn't forgotten the surveillance camera tucked high in the trees near the southern ridge.

But Alaric didn't care.

He had faith.

He believed Zara and Kael were just blind enough—just loyal enough—to ignore every red flag. That all he needed were a few carefully placed words... or better yet, a few of Scarlett's tears.

And gods help me, he **was** right.

That's all it took.

One trembling sob, and my own blood offered me up like a lamb to the slaughter.

It was laughable.

So Scarlett pointed her finger at me.

And that, ironically, is what saved me.

Had she not shifted the blame so quickly, I would've been pronounced brain-dead within the hour. My organs harvested. My body dissected. A footnote in Alaric's legend.

Instead. I was thrown in prison.

Tried. Sentenced Locked away.

Tortured.

Humiliated.

But I stayed alive.

And that made all the difference.

Because in that cell—cursed and spat on, starved and broken—I still breathed.

In the twisted, brutal maze of their lies, prison became my salvation. The lesser evil

Because the other path? It was worse far far worse

So when **i finally** crawled out of that hell, the truth still clinging to my bones like dried blood. I emerged not whole bit

And now, standing here in Lucien's Janor with the sath burning through every leg they ever built, I should feel triumphant

But damn

Besmet Five years a day get in the hell

The screaming in legs

3:56 PM P P •

Chapter 210

Or live screaming behind bars.

0

And now that I know everything—every betrayal, every blade—they carved into my back...

That's what hurts most of all.

Finis

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[880 words]

Chapter 211

Riley's POV

I had hated the Blackmaw Pack for five long years.

But now, after hearing the truth, I couldn't even bring myself to resent them anymore.

Because without Tessa, there would be no me standing here today.

I had already died five years ago.

My body had been hollowed out—emptied of life.

+8 Pearls

What was left of me was meant to be “donated” as a cadaver, preserved and prepared, so medical students could slice me open under the guise of education...

So that Alpha Alaric could stand before the world as a selfless hero.

His daughter would be cured of her kidney failure.

His reputation as a great and noble Alpha would be set in stone for generations.

How could I still hate the Blackmaws after that?

If not for Tessa, I wouldn't have survived at all.

In the end, she took my place in that twisted bargain, and in doing so... she saved my life.

I couldn't even bring myself to hate her parents.

A sharp ache pierced through my chest, the kind that makes your vision blur and the world around you fade.

I thought I had grown used to not being loved, after all the cruelty I had endured.

But when the truth was laid bare before me, I realized I wasn't prepared for it.

Alpha Alaric—my own father—had been willing to carve me open and take what he needed, like I was nothing more than a vessel.

He had thrown me into a filthy rogue settlement **as a** child, leaving me to starve and fend for myself.

When I was finally brought back to the Ebonclaw Pack, I was ignored, cast aside like I was invisible.

Eighteen **years** of hardship, and he never once cared.

And now, **even** after all of that, he still wanted my life.

I was his blood. His daughter.

How could a father be capable of such viciousness?

What kind of darkness had raised Alpha Alaric into the kind of man who could slaughter his own kin without a shred of mercy?

What had I done so wrong that I had to be the sacrifice for this scheme?

And for one fleeting moment, I was almost grateful.

Grateful that he had abandoned me when **I was** little.

If I had grown up in the Ebonclaw Pack, would **I** have turned out like Scarlett—cold, manipulative, and venomous?

Or like Kael Vale—blind and foolish, clinging to **false** loyalties?

No. I didn't want to be cruel.

12:24 **AM P.**

Chapter 211

0

+8 Pearls

I didn't want to **be** a fool.

All I ever wanted was a simple life.

Why was that so impossible to have?

This conspiracy hadn't only destroyed my life—it had dragged Tessa into a tragedy she never asked for, and it had brought endless grief to her family.

In that instant, I stopped hating the Blackmaws.

In fact... I felt like I owed them.

They had once been a proud, happy family.

Now, their daughter was no longer the same—she had awoken from years in a coma, but her body was frail, her lifespan likely shortened.

Their son had been ensnared by Scarlett's games and was now sitting in a detention cell.

I wiped my tears, forcing myself to stand so I could go to Tessa's parents.

But the moment I rose, a tearing pain ripped through my chest, my head spinning violently.

My knees buckled, and I felt myself falling.

"Riley-!"

The voices of Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia rang out in alarm.

The three elder women had been shaking with rage ever since Tessa had told her story, their eyes red from holding back

tears.

All of them reached out to **catch** me-

But Lucien Duskgrave **was faster**.

His arms swept me up before I hit the ground, his scent—stormwinds and steel—closing around me like a shield.

I tilted my head back to look **at** him, but my **tears** blurred everything.

The harder I tried to see his face, the harder the tears fell.

"Lucien..." My voice came out raw, **as** if it didn't even belong to me.

"I'm here." His **gaze** locked on mine, **steady** and unshakable.

"My heart. it hurts."

Five words.

Yet they landed like a blade in his chest.

It was the first time I had ever told him I was in pain.

Not even that night I drank myself to the hospital had I said it.

Not when Caelum Knox unearthed the truth about my **past**.

But now... it spilled out of me, and I couldn't stop it.

Lucien brushed away my tears with his thumb, his eyes holding mine with unyielding certainty.

"Don't be afraid. Whatever you decide to do, I will stand behind you—no questions, no hesitation. You will never need **to** look over your shoulder again."

12:24 **AM PS**

Chapter 211

+8 Pearls

I understood what he meant.

And that understanding broke the dam inside me.

For the first time, I didn't want to hold myself back.

I threw my arms around his waist, burying my face in the warmth of his chest, whispering over and over, "Thank you."

If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have survived this far.

Without Lucien, I might have been destroyed by the Ebonclaw Pack long before the truth ever surfaced.

The sound of my sobs filled the entire room.

I could feel the emotions ripple through everyone there—Tessa's parents included.

Dyskcliff and his mate's eyes glistened with unspoken grief.

Their daughter had taken the blow meant for me, and they had already taken their vengeance once.

But looking at me now, they couldn't summon hatred.

Not for someone whose life had been nothing but cruelty and loss.

It was a long time before the tears finally stopped.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[766 words]

Chapter 212

Third Person's POV

Outside the estate gates, a deep, practiced voice suddenly called out.

“Alpha Lucien, are you home? I’m Scarlett’s father—Alpha Alaric. I came here to personally compensate you for the embroidery that was destroyed.”

+8 Pearl’s

Alpha Alaric’s lower body was useless now, his once-commanding frame confined to a wheelchair. Caden Blackthorn stood behind him, pushing him forward with steady, deliberate steps.

The money in Alaric’s hands had been scraped together from selling the last property under his own name.

In truth, he shouldn’t have needed to part with it at all—every coin and asset he’d owned had long been transferred into Elira’s name. If she wished, she could have easily released enough to smooth the path for Scarlett.

But Elira was a woman of calculated greed. Once something entered her grasp, she never gave it back.

When she learned that Alpha Alaric still had a property in his name, she had leaned close, her voice dripping with persuasion.

“Alaric... once Scarlett **is** free, the three of us will leave Mooncrest behind and head overseas to join our son. That property will be of no use to us then. Better to sell it now—secure her release—and when she walks out, we’ll board the first plane. Won’t that be perfect?”

Alaric hadn’t even thought twice before agreeing.

When Elira received the news, she had been so pleased she celebrated with Caden in the back seat of a car in the hospital parking lot.

It was the last drop of value wrung out of Alpha Alaric.

No money, no home—nothing left.

Once they left the country, he would be left to wander the streets until the end of his days.

A fool to the very **last**.

And now, **that** same fool—shuffled around like a pawn—was being driven by Caden to the Duskgrave estate.

Alaric's plan **was** simple: pay the full **value** for the shredded National Bloom—two million—and ask Lucien Duskgrave to release Scarlett.

Just a little longer, Scarlett, he thought. Your father is about to bring you home..

He clung to that fantasy, a smug smile creeping onto his **face**.

After all, who could resist the lure of gold?

In his mind, Lucien's anger was **easy** to explain—Scarlett had disrupted Matriarch Duskgrave's birthday banquet, embarrassing him in front of the elite. But an Alpha prince was still a businessman, and businessmen always loved profit.

Once the money was in his hands, surely Lucien would let Scarlet go.

And when they were safely overseas, Alaric intended to hire someone to sabotage Lucien's East Ridge project—make him bleed every last coin until he was ruined.

Alaric was **never** the kind to forgive and forget. Anyone who crossed him had to pay in pain.

His self-satisfied smirk had barely formed when another car came tearing up the drive, screeching to a halt behind Caden's.

The door was flung open, and a woman burst out—bandages wrapped around one eye, moving like a beast gone mad.

Her one remaining eye burned with venomous fury, locking onto Alpha Alaric the way a viper marks its prey.

Chapter 212

+8 Pearls

“ALERIC-!”

Her roar tore through the air as she closed the distance and, without warning, delivered a resounding slap that cracked against his face.

“You murdered my father, sent Kael Vale to prison, and stole Riley from me! And now—you dare sell the house I gave you to save that bastard-born whelp of a mistress? I’ll tear you apart!”

It was Luna Zara—though now she looked nothing like the poised Luna she once was. Dressed in a hospital gown, skin as pale as ash, her empty eye socket wept fresh blood, staining the gauze crimson.

Her entire face was twisted with rage, a creature risen from the depths of the Underworld.

She clawed at Alaric, nails like talons raking bloody lines across his cheeks.

Trapped in his chair, Alaric couldn’t move fast enough to avoid her.

“Caden! Pull this lunatic off me!” he barked.

Caden, Scarlett’s biological father, lunged forward. The deal to save his daughter was finally within reach—he couldn’t allow Luna Zara to ruin it.

But before his hand could close on her arm, a larger, stronger hand caught his wrist in a crushing grip.

Caden’s head snapped up—only to meet the cold, hard gaze of Theo.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Caden demanded.

Theo’s presence wasn’t coincidence.

When Luna Zara had discovered Alaric leaving the hospital, she had been desperate to follow. Theo had been the one to drive her, tailing Alaric’s car all the way to the Duskgrave estate.

And Theo’s eyes now burned with disgust.

Only yesterday, he had seen it—Elira and Caden together in the back seat of a car in the hospital parking lot and had sex like beasts. The image had seared itself into his mind, leaving him frozen in disbelief at their betrayal.

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[842 words]

Chapter 213

Third Person's POV

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+8 Pearls

The bitter feud between Luna Zara and Alpha Alaric had become the most talked-about scandal in Mooncrest Medical Center.

In her fury and hunger for revenge, Luna Zara had dragged every sordid truth into the open—how Alpha Alaric and Dean Elira Blackthorn had been entangled for years, how Scarlett was not his true-born heir, and how Caden Blackthorn—Alaric's "driver"—was in fact Elira's own brother by blood.

Theo Hale, however, knew nothing of Caden's true identity. He still believed the male to be Elira's actual younger brother.

That was why, when he caught sight of the "siblings" tangled together in such depravity inside a parked car, the sight had nearly stopped his heart. Disgust rose like bile in his throat, his wolf pacing and snarling within.

Theo Hale was a male of unshakable principle, one who despised violations of bloodline law with every fiber of his being.

Clamping a steel-strong grip on Caden Blackthorn's arm, Theo didn't hesitate—his fist drove forward in a brutal arc, connecting squarely with the Omega's face.

The blow landed with a sharp crack, and Caden's head snapped back as blood burst from his nose.

Without breaking stride, Theo's leg whipped upward, his boot slamming mercilessly into Caden's groin.

A guttural cry tore from the Omega's throat. He crumpled, curling in on himself, both hands cupping the injury as his breath came in ragged gasps.

Alpha Alaric's fury ignited instantly. He shoved Luna Zara aside, bellowing, "Are you out **of** your damned mind?"

Ignoring the claw marks raked across his face, Alaric turned toward Caden with frantic urgency. “Caden, are you hurt?”

In his mind, Elira and Caden were bonded by a tragic sibling devotion—orphans from youth, surviving by relying on one another. He still clung to the romantic notion that Caden had sacrificed his own education, working from an early age so that Elira could finish her studies.

If Elira **ever** learned that he had failed to protect her brother, she would be devastated. Scarlett, too, respected her uncle deeply—always quoting the old saying, “A mother’s brother is second only to the father.” Alaric had agreed wholeheartedly.

To him, Caden was a rare gem of a brother-in-law—over forty, still single, having forsaken a mate and pups of his own for the sake of his **sister** and niece.

Now, Alaric snarled at Theo Hale, his voice dripping with venom.

“If you’ve damaged him—if he can’t sire pups **because** of you—you and I will have a reckoning you won’t survive!”

Theo’s lips curled into something **that wasn’t** quite a smile. His gaze on Alaric was the kind one might give a complete fool.

“You still have the nerve to worry about him? I saw him rutting with your mate with my own eyes. Maybe worry about your own damn dignity first.

At first, Alpha Alaric’s mind rejected the accusation outright. But something in his expression shifted, as if an unpleasant thought had taken root. His **gaze** swung sharply toward Luna Zara, and the fury in his eyes burned hot enough to blister.

“You vile creature,” he spat. “I should’ve known no wolf from your bloodline could be trusted. I’m away from the den handling the Ebonclaw Pack’s affairs, and you—unable to stand the loneliness—drugged Caden, taking advantage while he was half-conscious to force yourself on him.”

You’re a disgrace. A she-wolf who won’t tend to her den or raise her pups, but runs off to rut like a common stray—you make **me** sick to look at.”

Theo’s jaw tightened, the sheer absurdity of the accusation making his wolf bristle.

Lunja Zara’s chest heaved, her hands trembling as rage and regret tangled inside her. How had she ever been blind enough to choose this male—a deceitful, venom-tongued cur—over her own pride? He had betrayed their bond, abandoned Riley to **an** orphanage, and then, with no shame, dragged home the little whelp sired with his mistress, forcing Zara to raise her for two

12:24 **AM**

Chapter 213

+8 Pearls

decades.

And now he dared to twist the truth to paint her as the guilty one.

“Alaric, I’ll tear you apart!” she snarled, launching herself toward him, claws flashing.

Before she could reach him, the heavy oak gates of the Duskgrave estate swung slowly open.

Mia stepped out, her expression unreadable, voice cool as she said, “Weren’t you here to see Alpha Lucien?”

The air outside froze, tension spiking.

Alaric’s eyes lit briefly with triumph. He tore Luna Zara’s grasp from his sleeve—only for his brows to knit when he realized it wasn’t the Alpha Prince himself but a mere servant Mia.

“You old crone—what are you doing here?” he sneered.

Mia gave no answer, only meeting his gaze with a depth that was impossible to decipher.

Alaric’s pride prickled. She was nothing but a servant—how dare she look at him like that? He nearly barked at her, but the thought struck him that they stood on Duskgrave ground, and any insult to a servant here would be an insult to Alpha Lucien

himself.

So instead, he exhaled sharply through his nose. “Caden, let’s go.”

Caden’s breathing had steadied somewhat, though pain still shadowed his features. As he pushed Alaric’s wheelchair past Theo Hale, Caden shot the healer a glare sharp with unspoken warning.

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[870 words]

Chapter 214

+8 Pearls

Third Person's POV

—

The warning in Caden Blackthorn's glare was unmistakable a silent threat that seemed to say: Speak one more lie, and I'll make sure you never draw breath again.

But Theo Hale barely spared him a glance. Turning to Luna Zara, he said with an easy calm, "Luna Zara, let's head inside."

And so, the four of them crossed the threshold into the grand hall of the Duskgrave estate.

Alpha Alaric had rehearsed his opening words countless times before arriving.

Every sentence had been sharpened in his mind, ready to serve his purpose.

Yet the instant he stepped into the hall and saw who was inside, his pupils constricted violently, and a shock like a lightning strike roared through his mind, wiping it clean.

Tessa?

How could she be here? Hadn't Ronan Duskcliff already sent her abroad?

A ripple of unease slid through him. His plan had been simple once the Blackmaw Pack's little exile reached foreign soil, he would acquire a gun and arrange for Tessa's "accidental" death. No witnesses. No loose ends.

But she was here. Alive. Standing before him.

That bastard Ronan had sworn she was locked away in a fortified manor, guarded day and night, with no chance of escape.

Then his gaze shifted and when it fell upon the Blackmaw Alpha pair, recognition struck. Of course. They must have brought her back themselves.

—

Now they stood across the room, their eyes burning with a hatred so pure it felt like claws raking down his spine.

His

gut

sank like a stone into dark waters.

Tessa had told them something. Something damning.

—

Sweat pricked along his brow, his wolf restless with unease. He could not meet their gaze instead, he wrenched his eyes away, searching for safer ground.

But when his focus landed on the two elder women present, the air seemed to thin, his balance swaying.

What in the moon's name...?

He knew those faces. When **Tessa** had awakened in **the** infirmary, these **two** had been there – siding with Riley against him. At the time, he'd dismissed them as harmless elders, mere household staff or idle visitors.

Now he saw clearly.

The one standing, dressed in the same uniform as Mia, was indeed **a** servant.

But the one seated in stately finery, her presence commanding the entire room...

Matriarch Duskgrave. Lucien Duskgrave's grandmother.

The realization slammed into him like a hammer blow. He had insulted this elder Lucien's blood- without knowing it.

—

If she remembered, if she decided to stand against him....

Scarlett's release from the Stormridge Pack's holding cells would become impossible.

And then his eyes fell upon Riley.

The little wretch sat beside Lucien Duskgrave as though she belonged there, the Alpha Prince's dark aura wrapping around her like a mantle.

12.25 AM P

Chapter 214

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+8 Pearls

How? How had it come to this?

Unless... unless his earlier idea had been correct. When he'd first sought to tie Riley to Lucien for political gain, perhaps she'd already wormed her way into his favor.

Yes. That had to be it.

She was a climber, a gold-chasing she-wolf who knew exactly how to bare her throat to the right male.

Alpha Alaric's thoughts spun with calculating speed, but outwardly, his mask slipped only for a heartbeat. Then he forced a genial smile.

"Well, Riley, you're here too. You've been away from the Ebonclaw Pack for so long, not a word home... You've had your old man worried."

—

The truth was, he had never cared for her an unwanted pup, useless in his eyes. But she had always craved family affection. And if she still did, he could use that weakness, twist it until she agreed to plead for Scarlett's release.

But Riley's answering gaze was pure ice, threaded through with hatred so sharp it could flay skin from bone.

—

If she had wanted him dead after reading the truths Caelum Knox had unearthed, that was nothing compared to now not since Tessa had told her the full story.

She no longer wished for his death.

She wanted him alive... **so** she could drag him through every hell imaginable.

Yes. It was time for him to know. Time to watch his proud world collapse when he learned that his most beloved pup was not of his blood, that every careful scheme had only served another's gain.

Her smile was a blade. "You... worried about me?"

"Of course," Alpha Alaric replied, still oozing false warmth. "I'm your father."

The word father drew a collective sneer from the room.

Tessa's father, voice like venom: "You call yourself a father? You breed a daughter for the sole purpose of cutting out her kidney to **save** your mistress's brat?"

Tessa's mother, eyes blazing: "You slice open your own pup's chest for her heart, gut her for her liver, strip her for every organ she can spare and

you think you deserve the title of father?"

—

Mia's voice **was** cold steel: "And when there was nothing left, you offered her body to the healer's college, so they could carve her apart in the name of science all to burnish your name and legacy. That's what kind of father you are."

—

Each accusation struck like a lash across his back, one after another.

Alpha Alaric staggered beneath the weight of their words, **his face** draining of color. His gaze skittered **over** the assembly, searching desperately for an ally, but finding only condemnation.

For the first time, the unshakable Alpha of Ebonclaw Pack felt the sky falling in on him.

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[824 words]

Chapter 215

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+8 Pearls

Alpha Alaric had always known keeping Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack alive would come back to ruin him.

If he'd known things would spiral like this, he should have ended her when she'd still been locked in that endless, vegetative
silence.

Who could have predicted that a wolf trapped in darkness for years would ever awaken?

The muscles in Alaric's jaw twitched with tension, though he forced himself to stand tall, masking the sudden thundering of his pulse.

"I don't understand a word you're saying," he said flatly.

A cold, humorless laugh slipped from Tessa's lips, her voice carrying the edge of a blade. "Isn't this exactly what you and Scarlett whispered about upstairs five years ago?"

Her words were venom, but she wasn't finished.

"Not just that—you plotted to drive your lawful mate into madness, wear the mask of the devoted husband, and once you seized full control of the Ebonclaw Pack's holdings, you planned to kill her and wed your precious mistress, Dean Elira Blackthorn. As for Kael Vale? You wanted him chained for life to serve your mistress and her children, with not a single coin from your estate to his name when you were gone."

"That's a lie," Alaric snapped, a note of panic threading his voice. "The lot of you are conspiring to frame me."

"Frame you?" Tessa's sunken eyes widened, the gaunt hollows of her face making her stare all the more haunting.

"I heard every word between you and Scarlett. That's why you shoved me from the balcony—you thought the fall would kill me. But I lived. And my survival ruined your plan, so you pinned the attempt on Riley, making her take the fall for your crime."

She shifted her gaze to Luna Zara, her voice dripping with scorn.

"Alpha's mate, you truly are the perfect wife for him—and the perfect mother for Scarlett. Riley could have cleared her name. But you... you destroyed the security footage that

would have proved her innocence, ensuring she was thrown into the dungeons for five long years to rot in the dark.”

Luna Zara froze, her blood running cold, every bone in her body trembling.

She had thought the betrayals she’d already uncovered—Alaric casting Riley out, causing her father’s death, keeping a mistress, and placing the mistress’s pup in her arms to raise—were the worst blows she could bear.

But this truth... this was cruelty of another breed.

Five years ago, Alaric and Scarlett, wolves without conscience, had tried to murder Riley. When they failed, they branded her with the blood—guilt of attempted murder.

And Luna—goddess help her—had destroyed the one proof that could have set the girl free, then convinced Riley to take the punishment in Scarlett’s stead.

Her breath came faster and faster, her heart clamped in an iron fist. The pain tore through her chest, sharp and relentless, a metallic taste flooding her mouth.

She couldn’t hold it back—blood spilled past her lips with a harsh cough. Her knees buckled.

Through the dimming haze of her vision, she looked toward Riley, guilt carving deep furrows in her soul.

Her hand lifted, trembling, desperate to touch the girl’s face—to convey the apology she could never voice.

But the darkness swallowed her before her fingers could reach. She collapsed hard onto the cold floor, her last sight the unyielding figure of Riley seated on the couch, unmoved, her eyes like shards of winter glass.

Once, Riley would have risen. Once, there had been warmth.

Luna Zara understood now—she had destroyed it herself.

12:25 AM PS

Chapter 215

Riley... it’s your mother who wronged you.

Her

eyes slid shut, and consciousness left her.

Riley didn't so much as flinch, letting Luna lie where she fell.

The silence shattered as the heavy doors to the Duskgrave pack's grand hall opened.

Duke entered first, his steps crisp, his presence all business.

Behind him came Scarlett, Dean Elira Blackthorn, and Ronan Duskcliff.

"Alpha," Duke announced to Lucien Duskgrave, the Stormridge prince, "everyone you requested is here."

+8 Pearls

Lucien's gaze swept the room, his tone dark and edged with anticipation. "Good. The players are all assembled... let the show begin."

Few understood his meaning, and fewer still dared to ask.

Tessa and her mother turned their eyes on Scarlett, hatred sparking like wildfire.

In contrast, Alpha Alaric's chest loosened in visible relief at the sight of his beloved daughter freed from the holding cells.

So his influence still carried weight—enough to force even the Stormridge heir's hand.

His expression softened, paternal warmth sliding into place, but the moment his eyes caught on her shaven scalp, rage blazed hot and unrestrained.

"Scarlett, who dared do this to you?" His voice was a growl. "Tell your father. I will see to it they pay in blood. I'll show them what it means to cross the daughter of the Ebonclaw Pack's Alpha."

Scarlett, however, had gone utterly still, frozen the instant her eyes locked on Tessa.

Fear poured into her veins like ice water.

And when she met the burning stares of Tessa, her mother, and her father, her heart lurched violently in her chest.

They knew.

Tessa must have told them everything about what happened five years ago.

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[633 words]

Chapter 216

For a moment, all words seemed to choke in the throat, caught by an invisible hand-

“Scarlett, don’t be afraid. Tell your father—he will avenge you.”

+8 Pearls

-no one could utter a single syllable.

Alpha Alaric’s voice broke the silence, but before Scarlett could respond, a low, icy voice cut through the tension.

“It was me. What kind of revenge does Alpha Alaric plan to take against me?”

Alaric stiffened, eyes wide in disbelief as he turned to see Lucien Dusgrave lounging casually on the sofa. His long legs were crossed with effortless grace, his demeanor lazy but imbued with an innate regal authority.

Lucien was like a predator toying with its prey—aloof, superior, untouchable. Though seated, his gaze bore down from an impossible height, calm and indifferent, yet commanding undeniable respect.

That look was like gazing upon trash.

Even Alaric, steeped in arrogance, couldn’t help but doubt himself in that moment. Had Lucien truly released Scarlett from the holding cells out of respect for Alaric’s status?

Suddenly, the prince’s earlier words echoed sharply in his mind: “The real show is about to begin.”

A show?

Alaric’s instincts screamed that whatever Lucien meant, it wouldn’t bode well for him.

As self-doubt gnawed at him, Tessa’s mother—her eyes bloodshot and wild with fury—could no longer contain herself.

Like a lioness defending her cub, she lunged toward Scarlett and delivered a resounding slap across her face.

The force sent Scarlett's head snapping sideways, five distinct fingers branded sharply on her pale cheek.

"My daughter was guided to the forest by you," Tessa's mother hissed through trembling lips. "And yet you dare to frame Riley? You're no human—you're a monster!"

Scarlett's actions had left Tessa a vegetable for five long years. And Riley had endured unimaginable torment while the Ebonciaw Pack's traitors—Scarlett and Alaric—mocked them all behind their backs.

The Blackmaw family had been played like fools, their fury and sorrow all aimed at innocent Riley.

Five years of blind vengeance, a lifetime destroyed—not just Riley's, but Tessa's too.

Tessa had been just fifteen when she became a vegetable, a promising student admitted to Mooncrest Academy—the most elite high school in Mooncrest, where only two from the upper echelons had been accepted: Riley and Tessa herself.

Riley's university years were spent behind bars.

Tessa's high school and university dreams were confined to a hospital bed.

How could Tessa's mother not hate the woman who ruined her daughter's entire life?

Her hatred was so fierce she wished she could tear Scarlett apart limb by limb.

She raised her hand again, ready to strike, but Ronan Duskcliff grabbed her arm firmly.

"Mom, how can you hit Scarlett without knowing the whole story?"

Pain flickered across Tessa's mother's face. "Tessa was attacked into this state. Doesn't that justify my anger?"

"Impossible!" Ronan's voice was resolute. "You Knew Scarlett—you know her kindness. She would never harmed Tessa. There must be some misunderstanding. Maybe Tessa lost her direction..."

Ronan!"

Before he could finish, Tessa's voice cut sharply through the room.

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Chapter 216

Her icy glare fixed on Ronan was not that of a sister to her brother, but of a sworn enemy.

How could Ronan still defend Scarlett at this moment?

He was the one who claimed to love Riley but had inflicted the deepest wounds upon her.

He was the one who wanted to break off the engagement with Scarlett back then.

Now, when the truth was revealed, he scrambled desperately to exonerate her.

Tessa's disgust for Ronan was profound—his behavior hurt her more than Scarlett ever had.

+8 Pearls

"Ronan," she shouted, voice raw with fury and pain, "I'm telling you clearly now: it was Scarlett who forced me to the forest five years ago. Riley was innocent!"

"No, it wasn't me! I swear it wasn't!" Scarlett shook her head desperately, tears brimming as the fresh red handprint on her face made her look like a victim of the cruelest injustice.

"Ronan, please, you have to believe me." Her voice cracked with sobs.

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430

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- in Vengeance 217

[618 words]

Chapter 217

+8 Pearls

Ronan Duskliff was the last person to want to see Scarlett cry. His eyes sharpened with warning as he fixed Tessa with a severe look.

“Tessa, you can’t just say things like that. This concerns Scarlett’s reputation. And I believe Scarlett would never do such a thing.”

Tessa’s anger flared instantly. “Her reputation? What about Riley’s?” She clenched her fists, her eyes burning with resentment.

If she could stand, she would have struck Ronan without hesitation.

“Do you want to know why Scarlett lured me into the Black Forest? Why I was attacked by Rogues?” Tessa’s voice cracked with bitter hatred.

“Because those two—Scarlett and Alpha Alaric—are nothing but beasts. They conspired to destroy Riley. They didn’t care if she lived or died. Their plan was to trap her in a hospital, declare her brain dead, harvest her kidneys for Scarlett, and donate the rest of her organs. Even Riley’s body was to be donated as a cadaver for medical students.”

“They wanted me silenced because I overheard their scheme. Then they framed Riley with attempted murder to cover their tracks.”

Breathing heavily from the fury, Tessa shouted the five-year-old truth directly at Ronan. Her face flushed crimson, voice ragged from exhaustion and rage.

Ronan’s expression collapsed as if struck by lightning. The truth shattered everything he believed.

In his twenty-plus years, he had never met such ruthless cruelty.

He shook his head in disbelief. “Impossible. You’re lying. Even if Scarlett and Alaric planned this, no hospital would cooperate.”

His eyes lit up suddenly, catching a supposed flaw in Tessa’s story.

“Exactly! Hospitals don’t cooperate with evil plots. You must be delusional from being a vegetable for five years. Riley’s the one who hurt you, and you’re mixing up the truth, blaming Scarlett.”

He turned to his parents with an exasperated tone.

“Mom, Dad, don’t be fooled by Tessa’s lies. This **is** clearly a misunderstanding. Let’s take her home. Causing a scene in someone else’s house-”

Before he could finish, Mrs. Duskcliff fiercely shook off his hand and slapped him across the face.

“How did I raise such a fool who can’t tell right from wrong?” she scolded bitterly.

Ronan turned away, bloodshot eyes blazing red with humiliation.

“How can you not believe the glaring evidence that hospitals wouldn’t help Scarlett and Alaric harm someone?”

His gaze suddenly snapped to Riley, who sat coldly observing the scene. He ground his teeth in fury,

“You’ve turned me against my own family. Are you satisfied now?”

Riley had long since endured Ronan’s foolishness.

Foolishness, she knew, could be far worse than malice.

She had tried to explain, but Ronan had deaf ears. Even when Tessa testified, his doubts remained.

His self-righteous attitude—that everyone else was blind but he alone saw clearly—made Riley want to laugh bitterly.

“Since **you** say hospitals would never cooperate with Scarlett and Alaric, I’ll show you proof of exactly why they did.”

Riley opened the drawer of the coffee table and pulled out a document.

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Chapter 217

She rose slowly, limping slightly, and walked toward Ronan.

As she approached, his heart suddenly hammered fiercely.

Her eyes were too steady, her expression too calm—something told him this wasn't going to end well.

Standing in front of him, Riley met his gaze without flinching and handed over the papers.

“Read this. Then you'll understand why the hospital was complicit.”

Ronan instinctively avoided her eyes. Masking his inner panic, he scoffed coldly.

“Fine. Let's see what tricks you have.”

He snatched the document from her hand and flipped through the pages quickly.

With each turn, his hand began to tremble uncontrollably, and his breathing grew shallow.

The director of Mooncrest's top hospital was none other than Scarlett's biological mother—and Alaric's mistress.

No wonder Scarlett and Alaric had been so confident the hospital would cooperate.

Scarlett stood beside Ronan, watching the papers with equal clarity.

Her pupils dilated sharply; fear and shock overwhelmed her.

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[682 words]

Chapter 218

Scarlett never imagined that her entire lineage would be uncovered so thoroughly.

+8 Pearls

This time, fear truly gripped her—a visceral, cold dread that Lucien Duskgrave’s reach extended even to secrets buried over twenty years ago.

Her mind churned with a single desperate thought: she couldn’t stay here any longer. She had to run. Now.

With a sudden pivot, Scarlett bolted, every muscle screaming to flee.

But before she could escape, an iron grip like a bear’s clamped down on her shoulder, the pressure intense enough to crush bone.

Ronan Duskcliff’s voice grated through clenched teeth. “Scarlett, you haven’t explained yourself yet. Where do you think you’re going?”

Pain blossomed across Scarlett’s shoulder, tears stinging her

“Ronan, you’re hurting me.”

eyes.

That one sentence ignited a torrent in Ronan's chest—years of suppressed fury and grief breaking free like a flood.

"You feel pain?" he snarled.

"When you pushed Tessa into the Black Forest, did you think she wouldn't feel pain?"

"When you conspired to imprison Riley, bribed the rogues in that hellhole of a prison to torment her—did you think Riley wouldn't feel pain?"

"And you, Alaric, and Dean Elira Blackthorn," he spat, his finger stabbing the air toward the cold woman standing nearby, "when you plotted to carve Riley's organs from her living body, did you think she wouldn't scream?"

Rage burned in his eyes as he flung the documents hard into Scarlett's face.

"Lying bitch! You've been deceiving me all along!"

Tears spilled uncontrollably down Ronan's cheeks—whether for his own foolishness or for the betrayal of Riley, he could no longer tell.

Then, with a sharp **slap**, he struck Scarlett hard, sending her crashing to the floor.

"Scarlett—"

In unison, Dean Elira, Caden Blackthorn, and Alpha Alaric gasped and rushed to Scarlett's side.

But Ronan had no time for them. His eyes, burning with regret and pain, sought Riley.

Words to pour out, apologies to make—but the wounds he'd inflicted were too deep.

Moments ago, he had sworn to defend Scarlett.

But it had all been a lie, born from his blindness.

Scarlett's acting had fooled him, made him a victim of her manipulation.

Desperation drove him to reach out, to pull Riley into an embrace heavy with regret.

But Riley's brow furrowed in disdain. She recoiled from the touch, repulsed.

Her injured legs trembled, making it impossible to escape quickly

Just as Ronan's arms were about to envelop her, a strong, graceful hand shot out and encircled her waist with steady, unyielding strength.

A rush of sharp cedar and faint tobacco scent surrounded her as she was drawn into Lucien Duskgrave's protective embrace.

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Without hesitation, Lucien's boot shot forward, delivering a brutal kick that sent Ronan sprawling across the floor.

"My people," Lucien's voice dropped icy and low, "you don't get to touch."

Ronan lay sprawled, struggling to rise, pain and desperation etching his face.

"Riley... I didn't mean to... Please forgive me..."

+8 Pearls

Riley was silent, buried against Lucien's chest, her breath steady despite the chaos around her.

Ronan's pleas fell on deaf ears, his hope collapsing into despair.

She would never forgive him.

His chance with the girl he loved was lost forever.

The sight of Riley and Lucien locked together in quiet solidarity stung Ronan like a poison.

Summoning his last shred of strength, he staggered to his feet, fists clenched tight.

"Let go of Riley!" he roared.

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Lucien didn't even glance at him as he held Riley closer and began to step back.

Ronan's fury exploded—bloodshot eyes blazing as he charged forward.

"I said, let go of Riley—"

Before he could reach them, Alpha Duskcliff's booming voice cut through the tension like thunder.

"Enough!"

Alpha Duskcliff's hand swung, delivering a hard slap to Ronan's cheek.

"Ungrateful whelp, how long will you keep embarrassing yourself?"

Mrs Duskcliff's disappointed voice followed.

"Ronan, you have failed us."—

From the shadows, Tessa sneered coldly, venom dripping from every word.

"I'm ashamed to call you my brother. Having you as a brother is a curse that has lasted eight generations. From now on, you're no longer my brother—and I'm no longer your **sister**."

"No, no, it's not like that. It's not my fault. Scarlett used me. I'm just another victim," Ronan cried, shaking his head wildly, desperate to justify himself.

But Riley's forgiveness was gone, vanished like smoke on the wind.

His family's rejection only deepened his agony.

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[669 words]

Chapter 219

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Ronan Duskcliff's mind buzzed wildly, bloodshot eyes burning with fury and confusion.

Unable to direct his anger at Riley or his own family, he unleashed it mercilessly upon Scarlett and Alpha Alaric.

"It's all your fault—"

+8 Pearls

With a savage punch, Ronan sent Alpha Alaric sprawling to the ground. Without hesitation, he turned on Scarlett, raining down fists and kicks.

“Wretched bitch, die, die, die...”

Scarlett’s cries filled the room, desperate and broken.

Caden Blackthorn’s protective rage ignited instantly when he saw his daughter being beaten. He lunged at Ronan to stop the assault.

But Ronan was a powerhouse, his strength amplified by the storm of emotions inside him. He overwhelmed Caden with brutal force, pinning him to the ground in a relentless barrage.

Dean Elira Blackthorn’s heart shattered witnessing the chaos. She stepped forward to aid Caden, only to be kicked aside by Alpha Duskcliff.

Alpha Duskcliff’s paternal instincts waged war against his sense of order—he couldn’t just stand by and watch his son destroy everything.

The room descended into total chaos—a primal pack fight with no clear leader or order.

Tears streaming, Dean Elira glanced pleadingly at Alpha Alaric.

“Alaric, why are you still looking at those damn papers? Help Caden!”

But Alaric’s mind was a blank storm.

When Ronan had slammed him to the floor, Alaric caught sight of the scattered documents. Now, holding them, his hands trembled uncontrollably.

Black ink on stark white pages spelled out a brutal truth.

Scarlett was not the daughter of Alaric and Dean Elira.

The boy from abroad was not his blood.

Both children belonged to Dean Elira and Caden.

More shocking still, Caden **was** not Elira’s brother but her husband—they were legally mated.

Elira used a magic potion to hide the scent of her matched mate.

Suddenly, Alaric recalled a cryptic warning from Theo Hale at the Duskgrave estate gate.

The one who betrayed him was not Luna Zara, but Dean Elira.

Red-rimmed eyes blazing, Alaric stepped deliberately to Dean Elira, voice trembling.

“Elira, explain yourself!”

The events had spun far beyond what Dean Elira had anticipated.

Earlier that day, she had gone to the detention center with hopeful anticipation, longing for Alaric to bring good news.

She dreamed that if Alaric could persuade Lucien to release Scarlett, she could joyfully bring her home.

But there was no call from Alaric. Instead, Duke arrived with Scarlett and Ronan in tow.

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+8 Pearls

Only now did Dean Elira grasp the cruel truth—everything had been meticulously orchestrated by Lucien Duskgrave.

His plan was to gather them all in one place and publicly unravel the past.

Her heart hammered like a war drum.

If the documents proving Scarlett and the boy were not Alaric’s blood were confirmed, their family’s fate would be sealed.

Yet Dean Elira was a woman forged for survival. Even amid the chaos within, her face betrayed nothing but calm.

Taking the papers from Alaric’s trembling hands, she casually flipped through them before bursting into a sudden, mirthless laugh. She tossed the papers carelessly onto the floor.

“Alaric,” she whispered, eyes locked on his, “do you believe me—or do you believe Riley?”

Alaric, his anger simmering dangerously close to eruption, froze at her words.

Their eyes met, and in hers, he saw unwavering sincerity and a love that never faded.

Elira sighed deeply.

Alaric, don't you see? Today is a trap Riley and the Duskgrave pack set for us."

"Riley hates what happened to our daughter. She forged those documents to turn you against me."

"You cannot fall for it. If we tear ourselves apart, we've played right into her paws."

"My feelings for you have never wavered—you know that better than anyone."

"I'm the Dean of Mooncrest's Hospital now. Many successful wolf have tried to win me, even some young wolves barely in their twenties, eager to claim me as their own. But I've turned them all away."

"Isn't that proof enough of my heart's loyalty to you?"

Her words cut like the howl of a lone wolf under a blood moon—sharp, clear, and impossible to ignore.

Dean Elira reached out, taking Alaric's hands in hers, eyes softening with genuine affection.

"Together, we've survived pack wars, betrayals, and bloodshed. We won't let a ghost from the past tear us apart now."

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[699 words]

Chapter 220

D

+8 Pearls

Alpha Alaric's sharp gaze softened as it locked onto Dean Elira Blackthorn's delicate, yet unyielding face. Her voice, low and steady, cut through the storm of his doubts like a clear wolf's howl in the night.

“Alaric,” she whispered, “from the moment our paths crossed, my heart claimed you. All these years, it has beaten only for you. Even as your strength wanes, my loyalty does not. I am yours—now and forever.”

A deep, primal relief surged through Alaric’s chest. The fierce fire of anger that had consumed him flickered and died, his taut nerves finally loosening. But then, a sharp, gnawing pain lanced through his legs—the fractures from his last battle still raw and unhealed.

His form wavered, swaying like a wounded wolf on uneven ground, and Elira was immediately there—steadying him, guiding him into the familiar embrace of the wheelchair.

He gripped her hand tightly, a silent pact between mates. “Elira, I trust you.”

At those words, Elira’s heart stilled, though a razor-sharp edge of bitterness cut through her thoughts.

What a blind fool, she thought, eyes darkening like a midnight hunt.

Only a naive she-wolf like Luna Zara—lost in dreams of love and devotion—could be so thoroughly fooled by Alaric’s cunning.

Had Zara not been shielded by her pack’s wealth and a father’s fierce protection, she would have long since been torn apart by the world’s cruelty.

Riley’s fall was the tragic howl echoing from Zara’s blind mistakes.

Elira’s glance flicked subtly toward Caden Blackthorn, their loyal shadow.

A ghost of a wolfish grin tugged at Caden’s lips as he saw Alaric’s doubts crumble.

Alaric’s eyes, now burning with disdain, snapped to Riley. “You thought you could poison my bond with Elira through your deceitful pack games? You’ve severely misjudged me.”

“I’ve prowled the business world for nearly three decades. Your petty tricks are nothing but fleas on my hide.”

“You carry the Zara blood—venomous, sly, and treacherous to your core. Your arrogant snarls make my stomach churn.”

Alaric expected Riley to shrink beneath his biting words. Instead, she met his fury with cold, wolf-like pity—as if he were a mangy pup unworthy of her strength or time.

His face twisted, rage rising like a storm wind. “What is that look?!”

Riley's lips curved into a savage smile. "Alaric, you're hopelessly blind. The proof snarls right before your eyes, but you refuse to see it. Instead, you cling to Elira's carefully spun web of lies."

—

"If your own eyes deceive you, tell me why doesn't Scarlett carry your mark? Why does she bear the unmistakable scent and features of your driver, Caden?"

The room's eyes snapped sharply to Caden—the loyal wolf who prowled the edges of the pack's domain, unseen yet always present.

Now, in Riley's words, they saw it too: Scarlett's nose and mouth were cut from the same fierce mold as Caden's.

Alaric's expression stiffened—his wolf's pride stung.

Elira was quick to recover, her voice calm and sharp as a fang. "It's said that nephews often mirror their uncles. What's unnatural about Scarlett resembling her uncle?"

Alaric let loose a bitter chuckle, rough as a growl. "Only the corrupt see rot where none exists."

Riley's mockery deepened, ice sharp as winter teeth. "Then let's settle this like true packmates—a DNA test. Now."

Her words fell like a howl into the tense silence, freezing Elira, Scarlett, and Caden where they stood, caught in the crossfire

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of destiny.

+8 Pearls

Riley's fierce eyes locked onto Alaric's. "If you're so certain Scarlett is your blood, will you face the truth in the test?"

Alaric's knuckles whitened as he gripped the wheelchair's arms, his face draining of color. Yet no words came.

"Afraid?" Riley taunted, wolfish grin widening. "Or shall Scarlett prove her bond to Caden instead?"

Alaric's silence screamed his dread.

If Scarlett wasn't his daughter, all his sacrifices—wounding his own mate, son, and daughter—would be a bitter howl lost to the wind.

He wasn't defying the test out of doubt—he was shackled by fear of the truth.

Suddenly, Lucien Duskgrave's cold voice sliced through the tension like a silver dagger.

“Good timing—Dr. Theo is here. Duke, gather hair samples from Alaric, Scarlett, and Caden. Deliver them to Theo at once.”

Duke stepped forward, a shadow among wolves.

Caden's heart pounded like a war drum. Once the truth clawed free, none of them would leave the Duskgrave territory unscathed.

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Caden knew the only option left was to escape—take his mate and daughter away from this nightmare as fast as possible.

Caden's mind sharpened with resolve. Without hesitation, he swung a fierce punch toward Duke.

But before his fist could land, Duke's iron grip clamped onto Caden's wrist. With brutal force, Duke twisted, wrenching Caden down onto his knees with a sickening crack.

A sharp, gut-wrenching scream tore from Caden's throat as his shoulder dislocated. Power instantly shattered.

trained from him, his resistance

reach him,

Dean Elira Blackthorn's heart clenched at the sight. She moved to help Caden Blackthorn, but before she Duke delivered a merciless kick to her abdomen.

Could window

Pain exploded through Elira's body. She doubled over, clutching her stomach, curling into a tight ball on the cold floor, writhing in agony—helpless to rise.

Duke sneered, swiftly plucking a strand of Caden's thick black hair.

Without pause, he strode over to Alpha Alaric.

Alaric's eyes flashed with pain and fury—he struggled to resist—but Duke's cold voice cut through the chaos,

“This is the price for defiance. You saw it with your own eyes.”

Alaric's body trembled, realizing the futility of struggle. Reluctantly, he allowed Duke to pull a strand of his hair.

Next was Scarlett.

Though Lucien Duskgrave's men had shaved her head recently, her hair had just begun to regrow at the sides.

Scarlett's entire body shook violently, terror flickering in her eyes as Duke yanked three strands of hair from her scalp.

All the strands were handed to Dr. Theo Hale.

“Doctor, the task is yours now,” Duke said curtly.

Theo Hale, who had witnessed this brutal display, stood stunned.

The truth behind Riley's abandonment to the orphanage was far more cruel than he'd ever imagined.

At just twenty-three, Riley had endured a lifetime of unrelenting pain and betrayal.

How could Alpha Alaric—his own blood—treat his daughter with such merciless cruelty?

To think Alaric had once spat harsh words at Riley, the only sane soul left in the Ebonclaw Pack, made Theo's blood boil with guilt.

He cursed himself for trusting the twisted tales spun by Kael Vale and Scarlett instead of seeing the truth with his own eyes.

Taking the hair samples, Theo spoke with solemnity, "Give me an hour. I promise I'll uncover the truth clearly."

As he turned to leave, a sudden grip seized his ankle.

Looking down, Theo found Dean Elira Blackthorn crawling toward him, desperation etched into every line of her face.

"Don't go, she gasped hoarsely.

Theo's gaze hardened with disgust.

With a powerful shove, he cast her aside and strode toward the **exit**.

Elira, frantic, crawled forward, shouting, "I'm the dean! If you disobey me, I'll **have** you fired immediately!"

Theo halted mid-**step**, a sardonic smirk curling his lips.

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Chapter 221

"You probably don't realize the Hale Corporation holds shares in the Mooncrest First Peop

Hospital, do you?"

"The fact that I'm a doctor is because I love healing. If I wanted, that dean's seat would never be yours."

Finished

The longstanding business ties between Ebonclaw and Hale Corporations had been the ladder Elira climbed to power, but Theo—eldest son of the Hale family—held the real control.

Her threats were laughable at best.

With a final glance at Riley, Theo's eyes were filled with both regret and steadfast resolve—as if silently vowing: I failed you before, but from now on, I will protect you with everything I have.

Then, without hesitation, he left.

The room fell into suffocating silence—an oppressive weight pressing down on every soul.

Suddenly, Scarlett snapped, like a cornered wolf desperate to flee.

She bolted toward the door, only wanting to escape the nightmare she found herself trapped in—every second longer was unbearable.

Scarlett's fear wasn't for Riley, nor for the Ebonclaw revelations or even her own bloodline's betrayal.

No the true terror was Lucien Duskgrave.

The memory of his ruthless hand at Matriarch Duskgrave's birthday still haunted her.

That man was no ordinary Alpha prince—he was a predator forged of ice and shadows.

Every enemy of Riley had paid a brutal price—fingers severed, faces disfigured, teeth shattered in savage battles.

Lucien's wrath even shattered his own father's spirit, leaving the elder broken and haunted.

Scarlett could not bear to imagine what monstrous vengeance Lucien would unleash next, all in the name of protecting Riley.

She shuddered—knowing the black forest held darker secrets than any could imagine.

Five years ago. Tessa, had been lured deep into the shadowed woods—a trap laid by Rogue wolves.

There, beneath the ancient trees' cold, watchful eyes, Tessa had been ambushed and left battered, her howls swallowed by the night.

That forest was no place for the weak.

Now, faced with Lucien's iron justice, Scarlett's instinct screamed to run—flee the pack, flee the wolves.

But she knew better.

The forest belonged to the strong. And soon, all would be revealed under the blood moon's gaze.

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[625 words]

Chapter 222

C

Scarlett sprinted toward the door, yanking it open with desperate force.

Sunlight flooded in, pouring over her like a call to freedom, a beacon urging her toward the light.

For a fleeting moment, a flicker of hope and escape softened Scarlett's fearful face.

But that hope shattered instantly when she saw the man blocking the threshold.

A small, sharp dagger traced under her chin, lifting it, forcing her backward step by step

As Scarlett retreated, the man holding the blade came fully into view.

Finished

Tall and commanding, his figure was cloaked in a sleek black suit that accentuated broad shoulders and lean, powerful legs.

His expression was cold and unreadable—especially his eyes, burning with the icy fire of a seasoned warrior who had witnessed countless battles and spilled rivers of blood.

This man was none other than Caelum Knox.

“Go back,” Caelum's voice cut through the room like a bullet, hitting Scarlett's heart with brutal precision.

Her pupils dilated; her smile froze in place.

Reluctantly, she turned and returned to Dean Elira and Caden's side.

Alpha Alaric watched the scene with a sinking heart.

Scarlett's instinctive retreat revealed the deeper bond she shared with Caden, her driver.

Amid the tension, Ronan Duskcliff's gaze fell painfully on Riley.

His legs buckled, and with a heavy thud, he sank to his knees, tears streaming down his face.

"Riley... I'm sorry," Ronan sobbed.

Riley's face remained calm, silent.

That cold calm pierced Ronan deeper than any anger could—because it meant she had long since given up caring in the slightest.

on him. no

longer

His body wavered, barely holding together.

"Riley, I'll make amends. I'll make it right. Even if you want my kidneys, I'll give them to you—just please don't turn away from me, please," Ronan pleaded, voice breaking.

But Riley only averted her gaze, indifferent to his desperate words.

To her, his pain was **as** hollow as the air she breathed—meaningless.

Frustrated, Ronan began to bow his head wildly against the floor, each strike thudding with painful finality.

Soon, blood trickled down his bruised forehead.

Alpha Duskcliff turned **away** in silent agony, unable to bear the sight.

But Tessa sneered harshly.

"Ronan, does this look familiar? Like when you forced Riley to kneel by my bed, begging for forgiveness?"

Ronan froze, eyes wide in disbelief.

Tessa's voice dripped with venom.

“Even though I **was** unconscious then, I was aware. I heard everything you did to Riley over these five years,”

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Chapter 222

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“Do you know how every time you spoke about her miserable time in prison, yet stood by doing nothing, it felt like salt poured into my wounds?”

“All that suffering—it should have been Scarlett’s to bear.”

“How cruel you’ve been to Riley, yet so merciful to Scarlett. What right do you have to claim you

“You’re not worthy. Riley will never forgive you.”

“You got yourself into this mess. No one else to blame.”

Ronan’s world spun, blackness swallowing his vision.

He collapsed, crumpling to the floor.

Lady Duskcliff wanted to help, but the bitterness in Tessa’s eyes stopped them.

Their hatred silently aimed at Scarlett and the others.

love Riley?”

The room sank into a suffocating silence that stretched on until Theo Hale hurried back, clutching the DNA test results.

He stormed to Alpha Alaric, slamming the papers down in front of him.

“Here. This should finally put your doubts to rest.”

Two reports lay on the table: one comparing Scarlett and Alaric, the other Scarlett and Caden.

Alaric’s trembling hands picked up the papers, scanning every line.

All hope shattered instantly.

The results were undeniable—no blood relation between Scarlett and Alaric; instead, Caden Blackthorn Scarlett’s true father.

The blow hit Alaric like a lightning strike, his body reacting with paralysis in half his limbs.

At that moment, Luna Zara—long unconscious—stirred awake.

Her first thought was to find Riley. –

Eyes burning with desperation, she scanned the room until they landed on Riley, sitting quietly on the sofa.

Ignoring her own frailty and disheveled state, Luna Zara forced herself to move toward her.

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[673 words]

Chapter 223

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Zara’s hands trembled as she pushed against the cold floor, legs weak and trembling. She crawled forward in agonizing, staggering steps toward Riley, barely able to move.

Tears spilled freely from her eyes, streaming down her cheeks in silent sobs.

“Riley... Mom was wrong. I’ll never stand with Scarlett again. Please forgive me. Your brother... he’s in prison because of that scum, Alpha Alaric. Now, all I have left is you.”

Luna Zara’s voice cracked with despair, raw and broken. As a mother, she knelt before Riley, pouring out her regret in desperate tears—her pitiful figure embodying utter hopelessness.

But Riley’s expression remained icy and indifferent, just as before.

She lifted her gaze coolly toward Luna but quickly averted her eyes, refusing to engage.

That cold dismissal stabbed into Luna’s heart like a sharpened fang.

In that moment, Luna Zara felt the true meaning of “there is no greater sorrow than a broken heart.” Riley had given up on her completely—no hope for forgiveness.

The realization tore Luna Zara apart.

Her voice shook as she cried out, “Riley, are you really so merciless? You don’t want your own mother anymore?”

But Riley’s gaze was elsewhere, oblivious to Luna Zara’s words.

It was exactly this cold silence—the refusal to acknowledge—that deepened Luna’s anguish.

Standing nearby, Mia’s face darkened like storm clouds, fury flashing in her eyes as she confronted Luna.

“Luna, you have no right to call Riley heartless. During those three years Riley lived in the Ebonclaw Pack’s shadows, you never once cared for her.”

“You knew she suffered fifteen brutal years in the Rogue settlement. When Riley finally returned to the pack, you ignored her completely.”

“You funneled riches to Scarlett—millions every month—yet not a single coin reached Riley.”

“Scarlett paraded around like a queen every day, while Riley’s only outfit was the worn Mooncrest Academy uniform she wore year-round. You saw it all but turned a blind eye. Not once did you buy her a new dress in those three years.”

“Scarlett and Riley were born on the same day, yet every birthday party and gift was only for Scarlett.”

“Riley would leave early and return late from Mooncrest Academy, often going the whole day without a warm meal, while you all sat together, feasting and laughing. When I offered to bring Riley food, you forbade me—saying she wasn’t hungry because she refused to eat at home.”

Mia sneered bitterly, eyes filled with contempt.

“A high school girl, in the prime of her growth, overwhelmed with study—starving herself to the point of gauntness, hair dry and lifeless—and you have the heart to say such lies?”

“You never struck Riley like Alpha Alaric, nor framed her like Scarlett did, but your cold indifference is far worse.”

“I remember every cruel thing you’ve done, Luna. How dare you accuse Riley of heartlessness? How dare you say she doesn’t want you as her mother? Ask your own conscience—have you ever fulfilled even the smallest duty of a mother?”

Those words had been suffocating Mia’s soul for years.

In truth, during the five years Riley spent wrongfully imprisoned, Mia had often thought of abandoning the Ebonclaw Pack

But Carman, her youngest, was still in high school and needed support.

Even after Carman entered university, expenses grew heavier.

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Chapter 223

Despite the Ebonclaw Pack’s cruelty, the pay was decent.

Finished

More than that, Mia feared that if she left, Riley would have no one left to truly care

for and protect her upon release.

So, though resentful, she endured.

Events later proved her decision was right.

When Luna Zara, desperate to protect Scarlett, injected Riley with a wolf inhibitor—breaking her skull—Mia had risked everything to smuggle Riley away.

By chance, they encountered Lucien Duskgrave, the Stormridge Pack’s Alpha Prince, whose protection likely saved Riley’s life.

All these memories—each bitter wound—were etched deep into Mia’s

Now, with the chance to finally speak her truth, Mia felt a strange relief wash over her.

Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck, who had only known of Riley’s hardships in the Ebonclaw Pack, stared at Luna Zara with undisguised disgust.

Ronan and his parents, hearing this, were stunned beyond belief.

As parents themselves, with a daughter to protect, they could not fathom how Luna Zara could behave so heartlessly.

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[675 words]

Chapter 224

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Now, learning of Riley's tragic ordeal—wrongfully imprisoned and viciously betrayed by those unaware of the truth—Ronan and his parents were overwhelmed with guilt and heartache. Their eyes burned with sorrow as they glanced toward Luna Zara, whose presence now seemed utterly repugnant.

Ronan, collapsed and broken on the floor, was crushed beyond words, too ashamed to face Riley. Meanwhile, Alpha Alaric, confined to his wheelchair and partially paralyzed, surprisingly shed tears of regret.

Scarlett was not his daughter. For over two decades, he had been deceived, sacrificing his true daughter's happiness to raise a stranger—an outsider with no blood ties. The very same stranger he had battered and scorned relentlessly.

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Scarlett, this wild runt, had been pampered and raised like a princess, while his own flesh and blood—Riley—was cast aside into the orphanage's shadows, forgotten and alone.

He had sent Riley to prison in Scarlett's place.

He had allowed his own daughter's kidneys to be harvested for that illegitimate spawn.

Had Scarlett, that little viper, been mocking him behind his back all along?

Had Dean Elira Blackthorn and Caden Blackthorn conspired to call him a fool behind closed doors?

The crushing weight of this bitter truth pressed down on Alpha Alaric like an unbearable mountain, choking the very breath from his lungs.

“Ahh... ahh...” he tried to speak, desperate to confess his guilt and remorse, but all that escaped was incoherent babbling, saliva dribbling uncontrollably down his chin, sounds no one could understand.

Luna Zara was dragged back into the dark past by Mia’s harsh words.

Scenes of her cruelty toward Riley flashed like a relentless, tormenting film behind her eyes.

Her gaze turned hollow, those memories stabbing her heart like jagged needles—agonizing pain slicing through every fiber of her soul.

She saw a young Riley, clad in tattered Mooncrest Academy uniforms, quietly watching Scarlett surrounded by adoring crowds, her face a mask of longing and loss.

And yet Luna Zara had turned a blind eye, bestowing every shred of love and care on Scarlett alone.

“No, no..” Luna Zara whispered brokenly, clutching her head, trembling violently.

How she wished this were only a nightmare, that she could wake and rewrite her mistakes—to mend the wounds she had inflicted on Riley.

She remembered the pleading look Riley gave her when beaten by Alpha Alaric—the silent call for help she had cruelly ignored.

Now that gaze haunted her like a vengeful specter, leaving her trapped with no escape.

She pounded her chest in anguish, wishing time could reverse.

If she could, she would hold Riley close, buy her fine clothes, throw lavish birthday parties—make her the happiest daughter

alive.

But time was merciless, never turning back

She could not undo her sins; the scars she carved into Riley’s life had branded her soul forever—an agony impossible to erase.

Tears spilled uncontrolled her cries raw and desperate, as if pouring out years of pent-up remorse.

The proud woman was gone—only a broken mother consumed by pain remained.

Suddenly. Luna Zara spun around in madness, storming at Alpha Alaric with fists flying.

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Chapter 224

D

Finished

“It’s all your fault! You abandoned our daughter to the Rogues! Riley should have lived a life filled with happiness and love. You stole her destiny!”

Alaric, defenseless, took the blows—his face bruised and swollen, one eye crooked, mouth twisted.

As Luna paused, her gaze caught the DNA test clenched tightly in Alaric’s hand.

Her eyes locked onto the paper, and when she read the truth, shock froze her.

Then, wild laughter burst forth—sharp and deranged.

“Ha! Ha ha ha—”

“Alaric, look at how pathetic you are! Scarlett isn’t your daughter at all—she’s your driver Caden’s child. You... you’re lower than a servant! Ha ha ha—”

Her laughter convulsed uncontrollably, tears flooding her cheeks in torrents.

Alaric had mercilessly hurt Riley for a stranger’s sake—but Luna Zara herself was no less guilty.

Knowing Scarlett was not her true child, she still favored the outsider, blind to Riley’s suffering.

That thought fueled Luna Zara’s fury.

She slammed the DNA report against Alaric’s face.

Then trembling, she knelt to gather the scattered papers.

Every word weighed heavily, striking her like a brutal hammer—nearly crushing her breath.

At last, the truth surfaced: Riley’s tragic fate was rooted in Dean Elira Blackthorn’s inherited kidney disease.

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[643 words]

Chapter 225

Finished

Because Dean Elira Blackthorn desperately clung to life, she schemed relentlessly to seduce Alpha Alaric, causing Riley to lose a kidney, be separated from her true daughterhood, and even dragging her son into a legal nightmare that landed him.

behind bars.

Luna Zara’s mind was fracturing—torn between tears and laughter, her expression unraveling into madness.

“Alaric, you always claimed marrying into the Ebonclaw Pack was a humiliation,” she spat bitterly, voice trembling with rage, “How does it feel now? Betrayed by the woman you loved?”

“You abandoned your own flesh and blood for another’s daughter. You sent Riley to prison, turned her into a prisoner of labor. You drove the Ebonclaw Corporation to bankruptcy, funneling every penny you cashed out straight into Elira’s accounts. You even dragged your own son into this mess—making him a legal scapegoat for sins he never committed.”

“Alaric, you’re truly the model ‘husband’ and ‘father, aren’t you? Hahaha-” Luna Zara’s bitter laughter cracked like ice.

With fury, she tore the documents in her hands to shreds and flung the pieces like cursed offerings onto Alaric’s broken form.

The shredded papers drifted down like ashes, covering the once—mighty Alpha now reduced to a crippled husk.

Each word Luna uttered was a dagger, mercilessly driven into his heart.

Alaric had come to Ebonclaw University with a singular goal—to make

a

name for himself.

In the years before meeting Elira, despite the shame of being an outlander married into the pack, he had enjoyed comfort—wealth, status, a devoted wife, a brilliant son, and the power of the Ebonclaw empire.

Now, those old slights from his father-in-law seemed trivial compared to the humiliations inflicted by Elira, Caden Blackthorn, Scarlett, and the rest.

Alaric was drowning in grief, wanting to atone, but unable even to form words.

His sorrowful eyes locked onto Riley's.

This time, his remorse was genuine.

He had been so wrong—catastrophically wrong.

Had he known he'd lose everything and be left paralyzed, he would have gladly endured endless nagging from the old Ebonclaw patriarch.

His gaze was the most sincere it had ever been.

If he could stand now, he would kneel at Riley's feet without hesitation.

If he could speak, he would humbly beg for her forgiveness.

But even these humble wishes were beyond him.

He was nothing more than a puddle of broken flesh, slumped helplessly in his wheelchair.

Ever since losing her hearing, Riley's vision had sharpened remarkably.

One glance was enough to read Alaric's tortured thoughts.

Apologies? Regrets? Redemption?

Ma

She wanted none of it.

These were just pathetic attempts to soothe broken egos, clinging to life after losing everything

Had there been any other way, Alaric would never have bowed to her.

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Chapter 225

Riley's past was scarred by his cruelty.

◦

Why should she forgive the one who wounded her so deeply?

She did not just refuse forgiveness—she believed Alaric's punishment was too mild.

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Her hatred burned hot for Alaric, Kael Vale, Scarlett, Luna Zara, Dean Elira, Caden Blackthorn, Maddox, and Ronan Duskcliff.

They were the executioners who deliberately hurt her for Scarlett's sake.

As for Ronan's parents, Riley felt no hatred but no warmth either.

Their cruelty was not for Scarlett, but for Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack.

Riley's sharp gaze swept the room.

No one dared meet her eyes—each bowed in shame.

Her voice was calm yet resolute as it landed on Alpha Alaric.

“You showed me no mercy, but I will show you no injustice. Return to where you came from.”

Alaric's pupils dilated in panic.

What did she mean?

Was she sending him back to the mountains?

No, he would never return.

The savage Rogue clans there were merciless.

Once a proud wolf who left the wilds in glory, he was now a disgraced beast, a laughingstock among his kind.

Returning would drown him in whispers and scorn.

“Ahh... Riley, please... don’t do this. I am your father...” he whimpered.

But Riley’s words were merciless.

She was sending him to the Rogue gathering grounds.

A place he had once attacked with brutal force—now, a death sentence awaiting him.

For Alpha Alaric, the wild would be a harsher prison than any cage.

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[789 words]

Chapter 226

Riley’s POV

“Ah... ah... Riley, don’t do this to me... I’m your father!”

Father?

Finished

The corner of my lips curled into a silent, bitter smile. From the moment he cast me aside, I stopped having a father.

I met Alpha Alaric’s eyes, my own amusement never reaching their depths. “You and Scarlett share such deep father- daughter affection. I wouldn’t dare tear you apart. Why not let Scarlett follow you into the Rogue territory? She can take care of you there... good father that you are.”

Scarlett trembled violently, her scent laced with fear.

I knew why.

She once told me, with false pride, how she had flown over those lawless Rogue lands in her private jet—dark forests stretching endlessly, the shadows deep enough to swallow you whole. If she were thrown in there, she'd never make it out. And more likely than not, she'd end up in the clutches of unmated, feral males who would claim her by force.

“No! I don't want to!” Scarlett shook her head desperately, tears welling in her eyes. But her pleas didn't even scratch me.

I turned to Luna Zara. “The Luna's mate is a cheating Alpha, her son rots in a cell, and the stress has shattered her mind. Send her to the psychiatric ward.”

Zara froze as if struck by lightning, her breath catching.

She was shaken, yes—but far from insane.

She simply never imagined I would *dare* to treat her this way.

She knew exactly what a place like that was. The stench of unwashed fur, the screams in the night, the endless chaos of the truly broken. A normal wolf went in... and never came out the same.

“Riley... I'm your mother. Are you sure you want to do this to me?”

I smiled faintly. “The Luna is mistaken. I'm simply returning your mercilessness to you, exactly as you taught me. Isn't that what you always wanted?”

“No, Riley, please—give your mother a chance. I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you. I swear it, I vow on the Moon -if I fail...” Her voice trailed off as I cut her short, cold and clean.

“I don't need it.”

My gaze softened—only when it shifted to the Duskgrave family.

“I have a grandmother now. Mrs. Beck. Mia. And my fiancé...”

As if hearing my unspoken call, Lucien Duskgrave reached for my hand, lifting it for all to see. The silver light from the ring on my middle finger glinted like a blade. His voice was firm, steady, absolute.

“Riley has long accepted my proposal. For the rest of her life, she has me.”

The tightness in my chest made my eyes sting.

Lucien didn't look away when he told Duke, "Do as she says. Send them where they belong."

"No—! Zara's wail cur through the air like claws raking stone. "Riley! I can't live in a place like that!"

I laughed softly. "I survived in prison I'm sure the Luna will find a way to survive in a ward"

She shook her head violently "No... no, I can't. I won't go to that place!

"Riley, please—I beg you—just forgive me this once. Anything you want. I'll do it."

Chapter 226

I stared down at her tear-streaked face, my lips pressed into a thin line.

Finished

Zara's desperation spilled out in waves, her eyes wide and glistening, as if drowning and reaching for the last branch before the river swallowed her whole. She tried to crawl closer, her trembling hands stretching toward me.

But before she could touch even the hem of my coat, Duke stepped in, grabbing her wrists and tearing her away.

"Riley!" Zara's sobs turned into full-throated cries. "I'm begging you! Can't you pity me just this once?"

"Pity you?" My voice cut sharper than claws. "Coming from *you*, that's almost funny."

I bared my teeth. "At the auction that nig

Scarlett drugged me, when I nearly lost everything—did *you* pity me?"

Her eyes widened, the scent of her fear spiking as the memory slammed into her.

That night.

She, Alaric, and Kael Vale stood there—watching me, wounded and humiliated—not to protect me, but to defend Scarlett. They accused me of lying, of scheming, of tarnishing the reputation of their precious daughter.

I'd snapped. I'd thrown myself at Scarlett in a blind fury.

And then...

Zara's posture crumpled as if the bones had been ripped from her frame. She couldn't even meet my eyes.

I let my lip curl into a cold, knowing smile. "Do you remember now, Luna? You gave me the wolfsbane suppressant that night -do you even understand its side effects?"

Her pulse stuttered.

"That night, the rain was pouring, and you threw Mia out into the storm. She begged you, for my sake, for the sake of your own *blood*. But the four of you stood there—unmoved. Uncaring. Watching me suffer."

I stepped closer, letting her feel my shadow over hers. "So tell me why should I

—

care now, when you never did?"

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[706 words]

Chapter 227

Riley's POV

Finished

"You left me lying on that cold, unforgiving floor.... ignored, discarded like a wounded pup in a storm. If I hadn't woken halfway through, forcing my weakened body to crawl out of the Ebonclaw estate that night, I would have died there. There'd be no vengeance today—no reckoning—just another unmarked grave in your territory."

My voice stayed calm, but every word was a claw raking across Luna Zara's pride.

"I used to think—over and over—maybe I wasn't good enough. Maybe that's why you hated me so much. Why you wanted me gone."

A humorless laugh escaped me. “But then I realized... it wasn’t me. It’s you. You’re not normal. None of you are. I’m not even giving you back the pain you burned into me—piece by piece. I’m just putting you where you belong. You should be grateful.”

My words hit her like a sledgehammer. I could see it in her eyes—each memory of her cruelty replaying, cutting her like a dull blade.

Only now, in the weight of this moment, did she seem to realize she didn’t even have the right to apologize to me. What she had done to her own blood... it was enough to damn her to the deepest, darkest level of the Rogues’ wastelands.

She didn’t deserve forgiveness. She didn’t deserve pity.

Because while I was living like prey under her roof, she never once spared me even a glance of mercy.

Duke dragged her away. Her body sagged like an empty shell, heels scraping across the polished floor, leaving scuff marks like blood trails. Her eyes were hollow, her soul already fled.

Then it was Alpha Alaric and Scarlett’s turn.

Alaric was already drowning in despair. If I could turn my own mother into a hollowed-out shell, what chance did the architect of my entire hell have?

He couldn’t move. Couldn’t speak. Just stared at me with the eyes of a dying wolf begging its predator for mercy.

I had none to give.

If killing him wouldn’t bring the entire Mooncrest Council down on me, I’d have gladly skinned him alive and fed his hide to the crows.

“Get them out of my sight,” I told Caelum Knox, my voice a frostbitten blade.

Caelum moved toward Scarlett.

She flinched the second his shadow fell over her. “No! I’m not going to the Rogues’ lands!”

Caelum didn’t bother arguing—just grabbed her like a misbehaving pup by the collar.

Her legs kicked wildly, panic widening her eyes until they looked like a startled deer’s.

Right before Caelum reached the door, she screamed, “Riley, you can’t do this to me! Your kidney is still in my body! Let me go, and I’ll give it back!”

Caelum froze, glancing at Lucien Duskgrave and me for a decision.

Scarlett’s hope flared. She looked straight at me, thinking she’d found the one weapon that could sway me.

Everyone thought I’d take the offer. That I’d fold.

Instead, I laughed—softly, coldly.

“Why,” I asked, “would I take it back now?”

Confusion rippled through the room.

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Chapter 227

Scarlett blinked. “You... you don’t want it back?”

“Oh, I want it,” I said, my tone silky and slow, “just not today.”

Finished

I let my words sink in. “I’m happy now. One kidney is enough for me to live well. But you? You only have one. If I took mine back now, you’d die instantly. That’d make me a killer—and I’m not giving you the easy way out. I’ll let you rot in the Rogues’ lands first. I’ll watch you wear down—body and soul—until you can barely crawl. Then, when you’re nothing but a husk... I’ll take it. Legally. And I’ll have my kidney back and your death in one perfect stroke.”

Her face drained of all color, fear bleeding into her scent so strongly every wolf in the room could taste it.

she finally understood—I hated her down to my marrow.

This wasn't about spilling her blood quickly. This was about making her beg for death.

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She'd never survive out there. Not the cold, not the hunger, not the males who roamed without laws, looking for something soft to claim. She'd be dragged into a den, torn apart night after night until her body couldn't take the strain.

And then... maybe, if she was very lucky, she'd die before I came for what was mine.

Scarlett began to thrash, pure terror making her movements frantic.

But no one moved to help her.

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[762 words]

Chapter 228

Riley's POV

Finished

"No! You can't do this to me!" Scarlett screamed, thrashing like a trapped fox. "Even if you torture me to death, I'll never agree to donate my organs. You'll never get my kidney."

I arched a brow. "Dead wolves don't get to agree to anything. All it takes is your dear parents' signatures after you're gone, and I'll have what's mine."

The way she froze... she looked at me as if you might ha

cruelty from her—and from Alaric.

crawled straight out of Hel's den. She had no idea that I learned this kind of

They once plotted to leave me brain-dead, to harvest my organs like I was nothing but livestock. Now I would repay them in kind. Scarlett would learn exactly what it felt like to be gutted alive without a blade ever touching her—because I was going to make sure she felt the hole before she died.

She shook her head violently. “No! My parents won’t agree!”

Se from

a fresh kill.

Elira and Caden glared at me, fury bleeding into the air like

“You filthy little bitch,” Elira spat, voice trembling. “Over our dead bodies.”

I smiled slowly, a predator’s grin. “If you refuse, I have other Ways that involve your precious son overseas.”

ways

They both stiffened.

“Guns are legal there. So is wolfsbane in certain doses. I wonder... what should I do with him first?” I tilted pondering an art piece, letting the pause stretch until the room went still.

my

head as if

Then my eyes lit up. “Since my kidney matched Scarlett’s so perfectly... do you think your son and I would be a match too?”

“You stay away from him!” Elira roared, her eyes nearly glowing with rage. “He’s never harmed you—he’s innocent!”

“Innocent?” I echoed, my voice ice-cold. “Every meal he eats, every roof over his head, every coin in his pocket comes from Ebonclaw pack’s blood money. He lives fat and comfortable on the spoils of your sins. That makes him just as guilty. Father’s debt, son’s payment. One kidney is a small price.”

My words slammed into her, and I could see the moment her defiance cracked. Her scent soured with fear.

“No... you can’t... you can take it out on us, but not him. He doesn’t even know...” Her voice broke, and for the first time, I saw true panic in Elira’s eyes.

I knew why. She loved Caden to the point of madness. She’d slept with another male for his sake, shared herself to keep her mate alive, endured degradation for his survival. She’d do anything to keep him breathing.

And she'd do anything to keep his bloodline intact.

Her gaze slid to Scarlett, and I saw the decision settle like a death sentence. "Scarlett... don't blame me. I have no choice."

Scarlett's eyes widened in disbelief. "You... you're my mother!" Her voice cracked, a howl tearing from her throat. "If you agree to this, you're signing my death!"

Elira turned to me, her voice low, raw. "I'll sign the donation papers the moment she dies. Just promise me you won't touch my son."

cam was part sob, part snarl, the sound of a wolf whose own pack had turned on her. "You can't! I'm your

"Ma-" Scarlett's scream daugluer

She broke then Twenty-three years of being the pampered golden pup, of basking in the warmth of a mother's protection- gone in one breath The pain in her scent was sharp enough to sting my nose, and the way she looked at Elira as if her heart had been torn out and left bleeding on the floor

She wept, thrashed, begged, but I didn't flinch.

No one in the room moved to help her.

Chapter 228

D

Finished

Because every single wolf here knew—everything she was enduring now... I'd already lived through.

Alaric and Zara had destroyed me again and again for her sake. Now, the moon had shifted, the hunt had changed hands. The cherished pup was prey, and the broken outcast was the one holding the fangs.

And gods, it was satisfying.

The naïve, desperate wolf who once begged for scraps of affection from her so-called family had died in that cell. The day I walked out of prison, I had no plans for vengeance—only to cut the Vale out of my life entirely.

But they wouldn't let me go. They chased, they cornered, they bared their teeth until I was forced to bare mine in return.

Now my heart was nothing but scar tissue, pieced together not by blood, but by the ones who'd shown me real pack-

”

Lucien, Mia, Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck. They had given me warmth where my birth pack had given me frost.

And that warmth was the only reason I could wield this cold, clean cruelty without flinching.

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[773 words]

Chapter 229

Riley' POV

Their presence... Lucien, Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, Mia...

They were the reason I hadn't gone full monster.

The reason I hadn't dragged my enemies down into the grave with me.

Finished

They'd kept one small, stubborn spark of conscience alive in me. They let me believe—just barely—that there was still something in this world worth protecting.

But even that hope was like a dying ember, a candle in a storm. One wrong gust, and it would be gone forever.

Lucien reached across the low table, took a thick envelope from Duke, and tossed it onto the dark wood with a casual flick of his wrist.

“The agreement's here,” his voice was deep, resonant—an Alpha's command disguised in silk. “Sign it, and you two can leave.”

He was talking to Dean Elira and Caden.

The pair blinked at him, surprise flickering in their eyes. They hadn't expected the Stormridge Alpha Prince to let them walk

out.

But when they saw what was written... I smelled the shift in their scent, the sudden plunge into despair.

Every asset, every drop of wealth, transferred to me—no loopholes, no conditions.

Without their hoarded gold, they were nothing. And their son abroad? He'd be just as vulnerable.

Still, they didn't have a choice. Not with Lucien in the room. His reach was long, and if they didn't comply... their precious boy would pay in blood.

Dean Elira's hands trembled as she picked up the pen. The scratch of her signature was a wolf's scrap of property Alpha Alaric had stolen from me was now coming back where it belonged.

Lucien slid the papers toward me, his expression solemn.

The envelope felt heavier than stone in my hands—because it wasn't just wealth. It was justice.

death howl in ink. Every

I looked up, meeting those warm, velvet—dark eyes. The kind of gaze that could melt frost from a winter night. My chest tightened with an ache I didn't want to name.

He'd planned this from the start. He'd wanted me to have back everything the Ebonclaw Pack had ripped away from me. He'd been ready for this moment long before I was.

"Lucien... thank you. You've done so much for me, I don't even know how to repay you, my voice cracked, the words rough in my throat.

A slow smile curved his lips. "You really want to repay me?"

I nodded Hard.

I already owed him too much. He'd pulled me off that bridge when I'd been ready to let the current take me. He'd given me shelter, paid for my treatment, stood in my corner when I had no pack left to call my own.

Now this. This was beyond anything I could balance.

“Anything you ask.” I said, my voice steady this time. “I’ll give it everything I’ve got.”

The gleam in his eyes deepened, a hunter savoring the moment the trap snaps shut. “Then bring this wealth as your dowry... when you come to the Duskgrave estate as my mate.”

The words were calm, deliberate—yet they landed in me like a thunderclap.

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Chapter 229

My face burned.

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Finished

Last time, he’d spoken in Italian. I hadn’t understood, but somehow I’d said yes anyway. Now... there was no mistaking him.

I should have been happy—gods, I wanted to be happy. But the tears came anyway, unstoppable.

Because the moon had given me the right male at the wrong time.

I loved him. I loved his grandmother. I wanted, more than I’d ever wanted anything, to belong to their pack.

But my body was broken. And an Alpha like him deserved a strong, unscarred mate—not someone who’d been gutted by life and stitched back together with too many jagged

The tears fell harder.

Lucien’s brows drew together, and he reached for a cloth, wiping my cheeks with careful, almost reverent hands. “Don’t cry,” he murmured.

I tried to stop. I couldn’t. The truth was, even after bringing Scarlett to her knees, there was no joy in me.

Because once I finished embroidering The Imperial Bloom, I'd be leaving with Carmen—far from Mooncrest, far from him, far from everything in Stormridge that had become home.

The thought was a blade in my chest.

And I broke.

I lunged into his arms, burying my face against his scent—wolf, cedar, the faint heat of iron.

He froze for half a heartbeat, then wrapped me in those strong arms, one hand moving slowly up and down my spine. "It's alright," he whispered, knowing I couldn't hear him, but saying it anyway.

That's when I felt it—another presence.

Ronan Duskcliff stood there, his gaze sharp enough to cut.

The jealousy was rolling off him in waves, fouling the air.

"Duskgrave," he growled, his voice carrying that dangerous Duskcliff Pack edge, "let her go. She's mine—we have a betrothal. I'm her fiancé."

I almost laughed.

Because that claim... was more pathetic than anything Scarlett had ever said

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[769 words]

Chapter 230

Third Person's POV

Finished

Though Riley was the true-blood daughter of the Ebonclaw Pack, the one who had been promised to Ronan Duskcliff in a formal mate-bond arrangement had always been Scarlett.

Back then, when the Duskcliff family and the Ebonclaw Pack had sealed that engagement, Alpha Duskcliff and Lady Duskcliff already knew Scarlett was not Alaric's blood.

And yet, they had still agreed to the match—because Scarlett had been the jewel of Ebonclaw's den at the time, celebrated, fawned over, her scent carried like perfume across every pack gathering.

What Alpha Duskcliff had not expected was the venom that lay coiled in her heart.

But for Ronan, a male of Duskcliff blood, only the true-blood daughter of Ebonclaw was worthy to stand at his side.

The moment he learned Riley's true lineage, he had claimed her in his mind as his rightful mate.

And yet—despite that silent claim—he had never once stood for her, never once offered her the shield and loyalty a bonded wolf should give. There had been no defense, only suspicion and cold accusations.

Now, watching Riley fold herself into Lucien Duskgrave's embrace, head tucked against the Alpha Prince's chest as though he were her solid mountain, Ronan's jealousy flared into a feral blaze. His control frayed, and the words burst from his throat before his mind could catch them.

“Duskgrave, release her! She's mine—she's my intended!”

Alpha Duskcliff, Lady Duskcliff, and Tessa froze, the air around them heavy with shame. Their scents soured; they might as well have been wolves wishing for a burrow to crawl into.

Lucien's voice was quiet when it came, but his gaze was pure steel, a blade drawn and ready. He lifted his spear Ronan with that cold, hunter's stare.

His mouth curved, but there was no warmth in it—only mockery.

eyes from Riley to

Then, with deliberate slowness, he lifted one hand to cradle the back of Riley's head, his fingers threading through her hair like an unshakable claim.

And before anyone could breathe, he bent and took her mouth in a kiss.

The kiss was hard, dominant—a predator’s seal—and Lucien didn’t care that the Duskcliff Alpha family and half the room were watching. His lips moved against hers, coaxing and consuming all at once, and his gaze never once left Ronan.

The message was clear She’s mine. You were never in the running.

Ronan’s heart kicked hard in his chest, his hands trembling with rage.

“You—bastard! I told you not to touch her!”

He lunged, fist raised.

But Alpha Duskcliff moved faster, intercepting his son with a snarl. The sharp crack of palm against cheek rang through the den like the snap of a breaking branch.

“Enough!” Alpha Duskcliff’s voice was a growl, thick with fury. “Are you not shamed enough already?”

Ronan’s fists stayed clenched, but his eyes gleamed wet. “Father—he’s stealing my mate!”

“Your mate?” Alpha Duskcliff’s lips peeled back from his teeth. “Riley accepted the Alpha Prince’s proposal. That makes her his intended As for your mate...”

He hesitated, the muscle in his jaw ticking, the words tasting of ash your mate is Scarlett”

The truth hit like a winter gale.

1/2

Chapter 230

Finished

Ronan’s shoulders sagged, his entire frame losing that furious tension, and yet his gaze stayed locked on Lucien.

Lucien’s arms tightened, pressing Riley into him until her flushed face was hidden against his chest. Then, without hurry, he bent and swept her off her feet as though she weighed nothing.

He didn’t look at Ronan again. He simply turned and carried her toward the staircase, every step an Alpha’s victory stride.

Ronan’s voice cracked as he shouted after her. “Riley!”

No response—she couldn't hear him.

“RILEY!”

THE

Desperation drove him forward, but Alpha Duskcliff was there again, blocking his path, a wall of muscle and authority.

Upstairs, a door closed with a soft finality, cutting Riley from view.

Cold spread through Ronan's chest like frostbite, his last scrap of hope splintering.

He didn't dare imagine what would happen behind that closed door—but the image came anyway, burning his mind. Lucien's mouth, Lucien's hands, Lucien's dominance unchecked. The thought made him sway, black creeping at the edges of

his vision.

If not for Alpha Duskcliff's steady grip on his arm, he would have hit the floor.

Ronan clutched his face in both hands, dropped to a crouch, and his voice broke into a low, keening sound. “I was wrong... Riley... just look at me, once more...”

Only his grief-filled cries filled the room now.

Alpha Duskcliff and Lady Duskcliff stood in silence, their own guilt souring the air. They had wronged Riley too. They had no right to seek her gaze, no right to ask for forgiveness.

Her mercy in sparing them was more grace than they deserved.

Alpha Duskcliff's eyes hardened, his voice snapping like a whip. “Enough. You've no right to weep. We leave. Now.”

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[686 words]

Chapter 231

Finished

Alpha Duskcliff yanked Ronan up from the floor, his grip as unyielding as steel shackles. The younger wolf was still crying, the sound raw and feral, but the Alpha's patience had run dry. Without slowing, he dragged him toward the manor's

entrance.

Lady Duskcliff followed, her expression unreadable, pushing Tessa's wheelchair.

Tessa turned her head upward, eyes finding the high windows of the manor. Riley... you must be happy, she thought, the words echoing in her chest like a prayer.

Yet the moment they stepped outside, Ronan planted his feet. He stood unmoving beneath the shadow of the manor, head tilted back, calling out for Riley's forgiveness. His voice cracked, almost a howl.

Alpha Duskcliff's temper snapped. His palm lashed out—once, twice—the strikes sharp enough to leave Ronan reeling. Only then did the Alpha haul him away by force.

When they finally returned to the Blackmaw pack, grim news was waiting: the Duskcliff Group had been hammered by Lucien Duskgrave's Stormridge Pack until it was teetering on the edge of collapse. It hadn't gone bankrupt outright, but the ruin was close enough to taste.

The entire household fell into heavy, choking silence.

Then Tessa laughed—a cold, mirthless sound. "This is retribution," she said. She'd seen it coming from the moment she awoke to find Ronan defending Scarlett, blind to reason, willing to let others bleed for her.

If not for the twist of fate that had placed Riley in her path, the Blackmaw pack would already have fallen like the Ebonclaw Pack. Riley had spared them for Tessa's sake alone.

She turned to her father. "I need your driver."

"Where are you going?"

Her eyes sharpened, predatory. "The prison. Everyone else knows the truth. Kael Vale doesn't. As one of the accomplices who threw Riley into a cell, he doesn't deserve to live out his days in peace."

Without waiting for an answer, she turned her wheelchair and rolled out the door.

Deep in Mooncrest, in the sterile white halls of a mental institution, Luna Zara fought like a wild thing against the orderlies holding her down. "I'm not insane! Let me out!"

It took two to pin her while a third bound her to the bed. Fear widened her eyes. "Do you know who I am? I'm—"

The sentence withered on her tongue.

Once, she'd been the celebrated daughter of the Ebonclaw. Then she'd become Luna to Alpha Alaric of the Ebonclaw Pack. Now?

Her father was dead. Alpha Alaric had betrayed her. Her son was in prison. Her daughter's eyes held only hatred.

She was nothing.

"I'm begging you," she rasped, "I'm not sick."

The doctor didn't glance at her. "Everyone says that. If you weren't sick, you wouldn't be here,"

"I'm telling you—"

"You'll be sick soon enough," he cut in, sliding a needle into her arm. Cold chemicals flooded her veins, pulling her into a fog.

And as the world warped and dimmed, a terrible realization struck her: So this is what Riley felt. That helpless, caged despair when no one believed the truth

A single tear slid down her cheek before her eyes closed.

1/2

Finished

3:33 PM

Chapter 231

But if she thought Riley's choice was cruelty, she was wrong. Had Riley wished, there were far worse fates—like the one that had claimed Scarlett.

The Rogues had dragged Scarlett deep into the wilds, their jeers echoing in the dark. She had fought, bitten, clawed, tried to run—each time earning only a savage beating.

As the heir to Omega, she was completely unable to complete her shift. To deceive Alpha Alabic, Elira kept injecting her with wolf pheromones, giving her the illusion of being the perfect golden child.

And now, she couldn't even complete the transformation on her own.

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In the end, they shattered her legs to keep her still, chaining her like an animal in a sty, passing her between them whenever their hunger rose.

And as for why those same Rogues hadn't torn Alpha Alaric and Scarlett apart when they dared to step into Rogue territory-

It wasn't mercy.

It was vengeance served slow.

They remembered the night Alpha Alaric, in all his power, had stormed their stronghold, leaving their kin broken in the dirt. To kill him quickly would be too kind. Instead, they chose to keep him breathing... so they could watch him rot.

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[956 words]

Chapter 232

Scarlett had been in the Rogues' den for mere months when her belly began to swell.

Finished

Whispers coiled through the ranks of her captors, but no one knew—perhaps no one cared—whose pup she carried. The scent of pregnancy was faint beneath the stench of unwashed fur and old blood, but to wolves, there was no hiding it.

TH

At first, she had thought the life inside her might save her. Even in the lawless hierarchy of Rogues, there were codes— unspoken, fragile—about harming a female heavy with young. She clung to that sliver of hope like a drowning wolf to driftwood.

Pho

But these Rogues were not bound by the same rules as pack wolves. They were older than honor, filthier than decay, and cruelty was their only tradition.

The first night they came for her, her body was sluggish with exhaustion, her belly already taut. She thought they might hesitate. They didn't.

R

They tore at her clothing, teeth and claws flashing in the dim torchlight. Their growls rattled the thin walls of the den, heavy paws pinning her like prey. The air was thick with musk, blood, and the sour tang of her fear. She bit her lip until it bled rather than give them the satisfaction of her screams.

Night after night, they returned. Each time, she woke sore, bruised, her skin carrying the stink of them no matter how hard she scrubbed in the freezing creek outside. The pup kicked at first—small, frantic movements against her battered ribs—but as the days blurred into weeks, the kicks grew weaker.

The night it stopped, she knew before the pain came.

The cramps started like claws raking her from the inside out, building until she doubled over on the cold floor, her breath coming in ragged snarls. The Rogues laughed from the shadows, their amber eyes glinting with amusement as scarlet spread beneath her.

When the scent of fresh blood filled the air, it wasn't grief that silenced them—it was beasts as the life slipped from her womb, the pup never taking its first breath.

hunger. They watched like carrion

She lay there for hours, shaking, the world reduced to the copper taste in her mouth and the hollow ache in her belly. By dawn, her body was emptied, and her hope was gone.

After that, her life followed a rhythm as cruel as the moon's pull on the tides: beatings, snarls, forced submission. And when her body betrayed her with another pregnancy, the cycle began anew.

Twice more she carried pups. Twice more she lost them. Her womb had become a battlefield scarred by too many losses, cursed with the scent of death before life could take root.

The Rogues were not gentle when she was with child. If anything, they seemed to delight in breaking her while her belly was round, as if defying the very instinct that should have made them protect their young. Their claws scored her skin, their teeth bruised and tore. When she fell, they left her there in the dirt, twitching under the cold gaze of the moon.

By the time the beatings stopped—whether from boredom or because her body could no longer quicken—she was no longer the same female who had once strutted through moonlit ballrooms.

Months in the den had reduced her to less than prey.

Scarlett had been born into privilege, her every whim indulged, her beauty polished like a jewel to be displayed. She had dreamed of a mate who was an Alpha of wealth and influence, of living in sprawling estates where servants moved like shadows and her word was law.

Now she slept in a burrow dug into the earth, the walls smelling of damp and rot, the ground beneath her stained dark from countless nights of violation. She was handled not with the reverence of a treasured mate but with the rough, careless greed of males who saw her only as flesh to be used.

The old Rogues—matted fur, yellowed fangs, reeking of rot—were the worst. They did not rush. They savored. Their breathing was labored with age, their claws crooked, but their cruelty was practiced. They liked to whisper filth in her ear, to make her watch as they licked the blood from their fingers.

Her body became a map of their dominance bruises blooming purple and yellow, thin scars from shallow cuts, deeper ones where claws had sunk too far. She stopped healing cleanly. Each mark lingered, a permanent record of her captivity.

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Chapter 232

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Finished

Her mind did not fare better. The Scarlett who once schemed and smiled her way into every elite gathering had been flayed raw, her ambition replaced with the blank stare of an animal too tired to run. She began to lose time, staring at the wall for hours, hearing nothing but the echo of her own heartbeat.

Sometimes she would laugh without meaning to, a sound that made even the Rogues pause—sharp, broken, humorless.

Her hair, once a cascade of polished silk, hung in uneven, filthy tangles. Her nails were cracked and dirt-caked, her skin pale beneath the grime. Her scent had changed, too—gone was the honeyed floral perfume of a high-born female. Now she reeked of smoke, blood, and the permanent musk of her captors.

That

In the moon's cycle, months passed. But it felt longer—an endless winter that gnawed at her flesh and spirit alike.

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T

By the time the Rogues left her alone, she could no longer carry life. The healers in any civilized pack would have called it “habitual miscarriage,” but here, in the shadows beyond the law, it was simply another victory for her tormentors.

Scarlett did not mourn this. She had nothing left to mourn with.

Her eyes, once bright with calculation, were now vacant, reflecting nothing. The she-wolf who had entered the Rogues' den

was gone.

What remained was an echo—empty, brittle, and haunted.

And that... was another tale.

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[871 words]

Chapter 233

Finished

Back to that day's Stormridge Pack's manor, Lucien Duskgrave pushed open the door to Riley's chamber, the weight of her in his arms nothing compared to the weight of the things he hadn't said.

Her scent—light, faintly tinged with herbs from the healer's salve—clung to him. He set her down gently upon the bed, careful not to jar her leg. The mattress dipped beneath her slight frame, the furs folding around her like a protective cocoon.

He murmured a few low words meant to soothe, his voice rougher than usual, the kind of tone a wolf uses to calm a skittish mate. Then, without lingering, he turned to go.

From start to finish, his face remained composed—at least, it would have seemed so to anyone watching. But if Riley had looked closely, she might have noticed the truth betrayed in the faint, unnatural flush painting the tips of his ears.

Riley's chest warmed at the sight of him retreating, a pulse of sweetness spreading through her. But the feeling soured almost instantly, as though the taste of it had been spoiled by a bitter root.

She thought of her own body—of what the Alaric had taken, of what could never be restored. The hearing she had lost in one ear. The limp she couldn't hide on cold days. The absence of a kidney, a reminder carved into her with steel and pain.

What Alpha would want a mate so scarred?

What Alpha prince would bind himself to someone like her?

The thought landed heavy in her chest, pulling her shoulders in, making her fists curl into the blankets. She could hear the faint sound of his footsteps fading down the hall, and in the hollow that followed, a dangerous little ember of thought flickered to life.

Maybe... maybe I could try.

Maybe I could heal.

If there was a chance to mend what was broken—to walk without the limp, to hear fully again, to reclaim strength in her body—then perhaps she could stand beside Lucien without shame. Without the constant fear of being pitied or discarded.

The ember flared, lighting a spark of resolve in her eyes.

She shifted slightly, feeling the pull in her damaged leg, the familiar dull ache that came with the movement. She didn't care. She would find a way.

Some wounds might never truly vanish, but she would fight to make them smaller, weaker, until they could no longer be used against her.

Across the manor, Lucien stepped into his own chamber. The air here was cooler, scented faintly of pine from the branches placed by the window. He moved without thinking into the washroom, the soft pad of his bare feet muffled by the thick rug.

The mirror caught him as he reached for a towel. He paused, almost startled by the reflection that stared back—a man whose composure was intact everywhere except for the betraying crimson still staining the edges of his ears.

He almost didn't recognize himself.

He gripped the sides of the marble basin, his head lowering for a breath. Then it came, unbidden—the memory of the kiss.

It hadn't been an accident. He could admit that to himself now. It had been deliberate, calculated even, meant to provoke Ronan Duskcliff, to draw that protective fury to the surface,

But the moment his lips had touched hers, the plan had shifted into something entirely different.

Warmth. Softness. The faintest catch of her breath.

He had tasted defiance and vulnerability in the same breath, a combination more intoxicating than any drink.

Slowly, almost without realizing, his lips curved.

His long fingers rose to trace the shape of his mouth, as though confirming the memory was real. The sensation lingered there ghostlike, a heat that no amount of cool water could wash away.

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Chapter 233

A low chuckle escaped him, deep in his chest.

Finished

So this was what a kiss truly felt like—not the idle fantasies he'd allowed himself during long, restless nights, but the reality. Raw. Unfiltered. Far better than any imagining.

The first he had ever given.

And if he could have it every day... if he could feel that warmth, taste that mix of sweetness and fire again and again...

The thought rooted itself in him with quiet certainty.

He didn't like certainties when it came to people. Wolves were unpredictable, even dangerous, when granted too much space in his heart. He had learned that lesson young. But with Riley-

No. He didn't finish the thought.

Instead, he pulled off his shirt, tossing it aside as the cool air licked over skin that still burned faintly from being too close to her. He poured water from the jug into the basin, splashing it onto his face, trying to douse the heat.

It didn't work.

By the time he toweled himself dry and straightened, the flush had eased from his ears—but the restlessness had not.

Across the hall, Riley lay on her side, eyes open in the dark.

She didn't know that Lucien's thoughts were tangled with her as tightly as hers were with him. She didn't know that the kiss had marked him just as surely as it had unsettled her.

All she knew was that she would heal.

Not for him.

Not yet.

But for herself—so that when the day came, she could stand before the world, before any Alpha, without bowing her head.

And perhaps... so that she could take another kiss without feeling unworthy of it.

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[881 words]

Chapter 234

Mooncrest Prison

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Finished

The stink of damp stone and old blood clung to the air, thick enough to coat the back of the throat. Pale shafts of winter light slanted through the barred windows high above, but they brought no warmth to the corridor.

Kael Vale moved through it slowly, each step weighted by the heavy iron shackles that bound his wrists and ankles. The chain dragged between his feet, its links clinking against the stone floor—clink, clink, clink—a hollow, mocking rhythm that echoed down the hall like the beating of a funeral drum.

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Once, he had carried the bearing of the Ebonclaw Pack's heir—straight-backed, chin lifted, the wolf in his blood radiating command. Now his head was shaven, the proud line of his shoulders bowed under invisible weight. The thin gray of the prison uniform hung from him like an insult, stripping him of name and rank.

He had expected this day to bring familiar faces. His parents, perhaps—Lord and Lady Vale, stone-faced with disappointment. Or Scarlett, still stubborn enough to meet him despite the ruin between them.

He had not expected her.

Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack sat behind the reinforced glass, posture perfect, her expression carved from a glacier. She did not fidget. She did not blink more than she needed to. Her presence cut through the stale air like the edge of a blade.

The sight of her jolted his heart against his ribs. He tried to hide it by looking away, but it was too late. The shame was already written in the tense lines of his body.

The day she woke from her coma, he had known.

Not in his mind—his mind had fought it, denied it, grasped for excuses—but somewhere deeper, in the primal place where a wolf cannot lie to itself, he had known Riley was not the one who hurt her.

But to acknowledge that meant facing the truth: he had sworn under oath that his own sister had tried to kill Tessa.

He had handed Riley over to chains, to a life without freedom, to the pain that had maimed her body. To admit he'd been wrong was to stare directly at the ruin he'd made of her life.

The weight of that was something he had not been ready to bear.

Still, when Tessa's cold, unblinking gaze found him, he found himself moving forward, drawn into her orbit like prey toward the predator's den.

The guards guided him into the visiting station. The glass wall divided them, thick and unyielding, framed by the metal casing that anchored it into the stone. A battered black telephone receiver waited on each side.

Kael sat heavily on the stool. The chain at his ankles scraped the floor. He lifted the phone with a hand that felt stiff and clumsy. Tessa mirrored him without looking away.

For several heartbeats, they simply sat there—his breathing shallow, hers measured and slow, like a wolf scenting the wind before the strike.

She broke the silence first.

"What's wrong?" Her voice was low, edged in steel. "Cat got your tongue?"

Kael's gaze fell, his shoulders curling inward, as if the very air around her had weight.

The look stirred no pity in her—only a colder kind of satisfaction. In her eyes, he was no Alpha, no heir. He was a coward hiding from the truth.

"You don't have anything to ask me?" she pressed, each word deliberate, sharpened to pierce.

He swallowed. His mouth worked, but his voice was thin when it finally emerged. "I already... have a sense of the truth."

Her lips curved, but the expression carried no warmth—only contempt. "A sense?" She gave a short, humorless laugh. "Don't **make** me laugh, Kael. You don't know a damn thing"

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Something in her tone made the hairs on his arms rise. There was more beneath her words—something waiting to be unsheathed.

And then she began.

In clipped, measured sentences, she told him everything.

How Dean Elira Blackthorn had woven her lies like a spider spinning silk, deceiving Alpha Alaric until he believed Riley was a threat. How, on those lies, Alpha Alaric had abandoned Riley to the Rogue settlement, cutting her from the Pack as though she'd never been blood.

She spoke of the long years that followed, of how Riley had been called back after fifteen winters—not out of love or duty, but because she could be used.

Every foul detail. Every piece of the rot festering beneath Ebonclaw's proud name.

Her voice was steady throughout, but her eyes never left him, pinning him like a wolf holding its prey down with a paw until the last breath.

By the time she finished, Kael's hands were clenched so tightly around the receiver that the chain between his manacles rattled.

The sound seemed to snap something inside him.

He slammed his fist against the glass with a snarl, the impact sending a dull thud through the reinforced barrier. His voice tore out of him in a raw roar that shook the receiver in his grip.

"Lies! You're lying! You're trying to trick me!"

The outburst bounced off the stone walls, echoing down the empty row of visitation booths.

Tessa didn't ever flinch.

She leaned back slightly in her chair, her expression settling into something almost bored—as if his denial had been the most predictable part of the entire conversation.

On her side of the glass, the wolf in her eyes said: You can rage all you want. The truth won't change.

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[822 words]

Chapter 235

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“Lies? You’re already rotting in a cell, Kael Vale. Why would I bother lying to you?”

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Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack’s voice was cold enough to frost the glass between them. “I came here for one reason—so you’d know. You wronged Riley in ways no brother ever should. It’s my responsibility to tell you the truth. Kael Vale, for Scarlett, you tore into your own blood without restraint. Now... do you regret it?”

Regret didn’t begin to cover it.

The words were knives, sinking deep into his chest. Kael felt as though claws had raked across his heart, leaving it shredded and raw.

He had once convinced himself that five years ago, perhaps Scarlett had simply guided Tessa to the forest in panic, an accident she was too afraid to admit.

But this truth was a beast he had never imagined—Scarlett, together with Alpha Alaric of the Ebonclaw Pack, had plotted to take Riley’s kidney, to harvest her organs, to offer her body to the University’s anatomy halls like discarded prey.

If Tessa hadn’t overheard their plan, Riley would have died before the moon of that year had even waned.

EL

Even spared from death, Riley had been framed, cast into a wolf prison where she was beaten and abused for five long years, her wolf weakened, her body broken.

Kael's voice cracked, his breath ragged. "No.... it can't be... You're saying this just to make me suffer, aren't you?"

The chains on his wrists clanged as he slammed his palms against the reinforced glass, his eyes bloodshot, pupils blown wide

like a cornered wolf gone feral.

Tessa, unmoving in her wheelchair, simply regarded him as one might watch a rabid animal exhaust itself.

A hoarse, guttural roar tore from his throat. "Ahhh!" Then, with a sharp crack, he smashed his forehead against the glass.

Two prison guards burst in, trying to restrain him.

"Let me go!" Kael snarled, struggling against their grip. His gaze locked on Tessa, wild and desperate. "Bring Riley to me! I'll ask her myself—I need to hear it from her—"

Tessa's laugh was low and without mirth. "Riley will not see you. And you, Kael Vale... will taste the life she endured here. Every last drop of it."

With that, she hung up the phone, turned her chair, and rolled away.

Kael's pupils shrank. "Tessa—don't you dare walk away! I want to see Riley!"

But she never turned back. Her scent—sharp and cold—lingered for only a moment before it, too, was gone.

Kael collapsed to the ground, the fight leaving his limbs. His lips moved in a frantic whisper, over and over.

"No I don't believe it... you're lying..."

The words soon blurred with tears that fell hot and unchecked.

"Riley little sister.... I was wrong. Give me one more chance. When I'm free, I'll spend my life making this right."

But he didn't yet understand—by the time the prison gates opened for him, Riley would already be gone from his world, never to cross his path again.

Perhaps it was vengeance settled, or perhaps simply the truth finding air at last, but that night Riley slept with a peace she hadn't known in eight years. No dreams. No shadows. Only warmth.

When the dawn was still a pale smear over Mooncrest, she stirred.

She rose, washed quickly, and padded downstairs with a lightness in her step she hadn't felt in years.

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D

Chapter 235

In the kitchen, Mia stood at the counter, apron tied snug, a pot already steaming.

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Hearing movement, Mia turned—and her eyes lit with surprise. “Miss Riley, you're up early today. Hungry? I'll fix you some noodles right now.”

Riley shook her head. “I'm not hungry. I want to make breakfast... for Lucien and Matriarch Dusgrave.”

Her voice was soft, but there was a quiet pride in it. “I can't do much here. This is one way I can give back.”

Mia's hands fluttered in protest. “No need, dear. I've got it. Out you go—the kitchen's too smoky.”

But Riley slipped her arms around Mia's, voice dipping into playful warmth. “Please? Lucien and the Matriarch have been so kind to me. The least I can do is this. Teach me your recipe for sunshine noodles? Yours are the best I've ever smelled.”

Her head rested lightly against Mia's shoulder, the gesture so close, so earnest, that it melted the older she-wolf's resolve.

“All right, all right. I'll teach you. And when Lucien tastes them, he'll feel the warmth all the way to his core.”

Riley's cheeks colored faintly. “I knew you were the best, Mia.”

The compliment was well-placed. Mia grinned, the lines at her eyes softening.

The two worked side by side, wolf and wolf, in the simple rhythm of chopping, stirring, and boiling.

Half an hour later, five bowls of steaming noodles sat on the counter—broth clear and fragrant, noodles lying neatly in the white porcelain, each crowned with a golden fried egg, scattered with bright green onions and cilantro, a few drops of aromatic oil glistening on the surface.

It was then that Lucien Duskgrave, Matriarch Duskgrave, and Mrs. Beck stepped into the dining hall, drawn by the scent.

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Chapter 236

Finished

Mia's smile was warm as she called out, "Alpha Lucien, Matriarch, you must taste this—Miss Riley made these noodles herself."

Matriarch Duskgrave and Mrs. Beck both turned their eyes toward Riley, affection shining in their gazes.

"Oh, my sweet cub, so thoughtful," the Matriarch chuckled, her voice carrying the gentle authority of an elder wolf. "I've always loved noodles, and with looks and scent like this, they'll be perfect."

Mrs. Beck nodded enthusiastically. "Indeed. Just the aroma alone could tempt any wolf. If she opened a shop, it would be packed every full moon."

Mia straightened her shoulders, pride in every line of her face. "First time making sunshine noodles, and they're nearly better than mine—after decades in the kitchen. That's our Miss Riley, clever in everything she tries."

The Matriarch laughed, the sound deep and satisfied. "Exactly why I knew she'd be the perfect mate for our Alpha."

The three elder she-wolves circled her with words like warm pelts, piling praise higher and higher.

Riley's cheeks burned crimson. They were exaggerating—but the joy in their voices still curled warmly in her chest.

“Matriarch, Mrs. Beck, please try my cooking. If you like it, I’ll make it for you often.” She glanced toward Lucien Duskgrave, eyes bright with anticipation. “Alpha Lucien, you should try it too.”

Lucien’s gaze fell on the few sprigs of cilantro floating atop the broth. His brow furrowed—just enough for a wolf’s sharp eye to notice—but he said nothing, sitting down without a word.

Riley’s heart beat faster, her eyes fixed on him.

In

The scent of cilantro rose instantly, sharp and green, filling his mouth as he took the first bite. For an Alpha whose composure was legendary, the slight stiffness in his jaw was almost imperceptible. He swallowed without flinching, forcing the discomfort down, and gave a faint smile.

“It’s good.”

“Really?” Her eyes lit like a lantern in the dark.

Lucien nodded once. “Really.”

Riley’s lips curved upward. “I’m glad you like it.”

To receive such praise the first time she cooked this dish... it surprised her, warmed her. Perhaps she really did have a knack for cooking.

She picked up her chopsticks, tasting her own work. The rich broth mingled with the bite of cilantro and the fragrance of sesame oil, and her eyes softened, nearly closing in contentment.

Sunshine noodles—her favorite, no matter how many seasons passed. Perhaps because, in the coldest winter of her life, Mia had served her this same dish, and it had warmed her through to her bones.

As she savored the flavor, she didn’t notice the Matriarch and Mrs. Beck exchanging startled glances while Lucien ate. They seemed on the verge of saying something, but the sight of Riley’s smile kept their words caged behind their teeth.

Because of old injuries and a weakened stomach from her years in the Ebonclaw Pack, Riley ate slowly. By the time she had finished a single mouthful, she looked up to see Lucien’s bowl empty.

Her eyes widened in surprise—then glowed with quiet happiness.

Would you like another bowl, Alpha Lucien? I can make more.”

Lucien’s reply was immediate. “No. I have work to attend to. You finish your meal.”

He rose from his seat, movements smooth, precise, already turning toward the door.

“Alpha Lucien,” Riley called after him. “**take** Caelum with you. I’m not going out today, and I’ll feel better knowing he’s with

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Chapter 236

Finished

you.”

Lucien inclined his head in acknowledgment. “All right.” With that, the tall Alpha strode from the house, the door closing behind him.

In the car, Lucien leaned back against the leather seat, a flicker of fatigue in his eyes. He loosened his tie, revealing the edge of reddened skin spreading beneath his collar.

From the driver’s seat, Caelum Knox caught the sight in the rearview mirror and frowned. “Alpha... did you eat cilantro?”

He knew well—Lucien Duskgrave was allergic. Even the smallest taste would bring a rash to his skin like wildfire through dry grass.

Lucien exhaled through his nose, the sound controlled but heavy. “Find a pharmacy.”

Back at the Duskgrave estate, Riley set down her chopsticks and turned to the Matriarch. “I’ll be going out for a while with *Mia*.”

The elder wolf tilted her head. “Didn’t you just say you weren’t leaving the den today?”

Riley had indeed told Lucien as much. That was precisely the point—she’d needed Caelum out of the house.

Otherwise, the loyal wolf would shadow her every step.

“Carmen called earlier,” Riley explained smoothly. “There’s an event at Ashmoor Academy for parents, and I thought I’d go with Mia to see her.”

The Matriarch considered, then nodded. An open school event was hardly dangerous territory for their she-wolf.

Once they were outside, Mia glanced at her, brows knit. “Miss Riley... why did you lie to the Matriarch?”

Riley’s expression darkened, her tone quiet but firm. “Mia... I need to go to the Ashmoor to meet professor Maeryn. For a full examination.”

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[925 words]

Chapter 237

Finished

Maeryn Voss, the famed hybrid combat instructor at Ashmoor Academy, was equally versed in magic as she was in battle. Riley had met her once before. On that occasion, Maeryn had told her—quietly but firmly—to return once she had found her missing kidney, promising to run another examination.

Now, with Mia at her side, Riley stepped onto Ashmoor’s grounds. She retraced the path toward the professor’s office from memory, her heart heavy with a mixture of hope and dread.

But when she reached the door, it wasn’t Maeryn who greeted her—it was a young man with clipped brown hair and the crisp posture of an assistant.

“You’re Riley, right?” he asked without surprise. “Professor Maeryn said you’d come today. She told me to tell you she’s not here—she’s giving a medical lecture at Mooncrest Hospital. She asked that you meet her in the treatment wing there. She’ll be expecting you.”

Riley blinked. “She knew I’d come?”

The assistant only smiled faintly. “She said you’d understand once you spoke to her.”

The hospital.

The word lodged in Riley’s chest like a stone. Still, she turned away without another question, her limp carrying her back down the marble corridors and out to the waiting car.

Mia was quiet beside her during the drive, sensing the tension tightening every line of Riley’s body.

When they reached Mooncrest Hospital, the air smelled faintly of antiseptic and warm metal. The treatment wing was hushed, lit with the sterile white glow of mage-lamps.

And there—standing at the far end, sleeves rolled to her elbows, her silver-streaked braid over one shoulder—was Maeryn Voss.

“Riley,” the hybrid greeted, her voice calm yet expectant, as though this meeting had been inevitable.

Her hand came to rest lightly on Riley’s head, and a soft white healing glow spread through the air, brushing against the edges of Riley’s spirit. But as Maeryn’s senses swept deeper into the young she-wolf’s body, her expression began to harden.

The furrow in her brow deepened, deeper still.

When Riley emerged from the treatment room some time later, her eyes were hollow, the life in them dimmed to embers. Maeryn’s words still rang in her ears—each sentence another claw sinking into her heart.

“Your body... years of malnutrition, severe blood and qi depletion, and old battle-wounds that never healed. It’s been carrying too much for too long.”

“You’re missing a kidney, and the imbalance has left your wolf’s energy crippled—multiple organs are showing signs of decline.”

“I once thought that if we replaced your kidney and nourished your body, you might recover. But there’s something else... something far worse.”

That was when Maeryn told her the truth.

Eight years ago—on the day Alpha Alaric of the Ebonclaw Pack had ‘welcomed’ Riley into his household—he had caught a trace of Alpha wolf pheromones on her scent. Fearing her wolf might awaken and one day challenge his authority, he’d acted in secret. Without her knowledge, he had slipped into her food a rare, insidious wolf toxin—an assassin’s poison from the old lupine wars.

The toxin was a patient killer. It lay dormant for up to eight years, gnawing at flesh and bone in increments too small to notice. It disrupted the body’s healing, fouled the wolf’s spiritual core, corrupted the flow of qi. By the time symptoms showed, the damage was irreversible—death arriving as the organs failed one by one.

For Alaric, it had been a perfect safeguard. If his plan to harvest her organs failed, she would still meet the same end. And until then, she would remain too weak, too crippled, to ever be a threat.

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Chapter 237

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“Your hearing loss,” Maeryn went on, “isn’t simply from a ruptured eardrum. The toxin has devoured the nerve tissue—it cannot be repaired. Even with an artificial cochlea, your brain may no longer process sound properly. And after so long in silence, your speech patterns may also be affected.”

“The toxin has also invaded your legs. Even if the bones were broken and reset, you could only hope to walk without a limp- not to run.”

Every word landed like a blow.

Riley understood then—meat once cooked could never return to fresh flesh. Her body was beyond restoration. She would never bear children like other females, never share in a mate’s bond the way she had once dreamed.

“How long do I have?” she had asked, voice steady though her claws bit into her palms.

Maeryn hesitated. “If you take care of yourself... four, maybe five years. Your kidney transplant cannot wait. And I will search for a cure to the toxin—but I will promise nothing.”

Four or five years. She might not see her thirtieth winter.

Before leaving, Riley made Maeryn swear to keep the toxin a secret—especially from Lucien Duskgrave. Maeryn agreed, her heart twisting for the young she-wolf. She had the spirit of a white wolf born for battle, yet fate and her own blood had betrayed her.

Mia followed her closely as they left, eyes burning with tears she could barely contain. “Miss... don’t lose hope. We will find a way.”

But Riley limped onward in silence. Mia realized with a jolt—she hadn’t heard her. Her hearing was gone,

They passed the gates of Mooncrest Hospital when a low male voice

“Riley!”

cut

through the air.

Mia swiped at her eyes and turned. There, in pale hospital garb, stood Ronan Duskcliff, blocking their path. His face was gaunt, his eyes bloodshot.

The only reason Ronan was here at all was the night before—after learning the full truth, he'd drunk himself into alcohol poisoning. Lord Duskcliff and Lady Duskcliff had dragged him to the hospital before his liver gave out.

Now, seeing Riley, he stepped forward and seized her thin shoulders. His voice cracked.

“You... you came to see me?”

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[938 words]

Chapter 238

Riley's POV

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My gaze was empty, unfocused, until it finally sharpened—and landed on him.

Ronan Duskcliff.

Hatred surged through me like a predator breaking from its cage. I didn't bother hiding it; my lips curled in disdain.

“I don't even have enough time in this life to hate you fully,” I said, my voice cold as frost over a grave.

His face drained of color, his mouth trembling. “You... hate me that much?”

“Yes!” I snapped, the growl in my chest almost slipping past my human voice. “I hate you! I wish you'd die-”

Because if it weren't for them, I wouldn't be like this.

I wouldn't be half-crippled, my wolf poisoned and caged, my body decaying from the inside out.

And now—now I finally knew why.

D

Finished

Just few minutes ago, the truth had been shoved into my hands in the form of sterile hospital paper and cold, clinical words.

Alpha Alaric had poisoned me.

Eight years ago. On the very day he brought me back.

I could still see it if I closed my eyes—my younger self stepping off the transport, thinking my nightmare was finally over. Thinking maybe, just maybe, the Alpha of the Ebonclaw Pack had forgotten what I truly was.

But he hadn't.

He'd smelled my wolf instantly, hidden beneath the prison soap and stale air. And instead of chains, he'd given me something far worse: wolfbane.

Not enough to kill me—no, that would have been too merciful. Enough to rot me slowly from the inside, its venom lying in wait, patient as a viper.

Eight years. Eight years of a slow death ticking away inside me, and I hadn't even known.

I thought my weakness was my fault. My failing. But it had been him all along. Him, and the cruelty of letting me believe I **was** free when he'd already set the hourglass running out.

If I hadn't been thrown into prison back then, I would have gone to Ashmoor Academy like I'd dreamed.

Five years later, I would have graduated, taken a good position, built a life with pride.

And if I'd met Lucien Duskgrave then, I wouldn't have felt so small, so unworthy.

I finally liked someone—truly liked someone—and yet I couldn't stand at his side.

Couldn't give him a future. Couldn't even give him myself.

Hot tears burned my eyes and slid down my cheeks before I could stop them.

Why is my life this cursed? Sometimes I wish I'd never met him at all-

Because then I wouldn't have to endure the ache of knowing we could never last.

Revenge **was** supposed to feel good.

It didn't

No amount of blood or justice could piece my body back together.

Chapter 238

"Ronan Duskcliff," I said, my voice low and sharp, "don't ever show your face to me again. I despise you."

It hit him like a blade between the ribs.

Those three words—I despise you—kept echoing in the air like a cruel chant.

Suddenly, he lunged forward, crushing me into his arms as if he could fuse my body into his.

Finished

"Riley, don't do this to me... please," he begged, his voice shaking. "I love you. Hit me, curse me, anything—just give me one more chance."

I shoved at him, but he only held me tighter.

"You got your revenge on me yesterday," he said, his voice breaking. "My debt to you is paid. Let's start over. I swear, for the rest of my life, I'll spend every breath making it right. Please... believe me."

But his repentance meant nothing to me.

It was too late.

3

The river had already run dry, and a shattered bond never becomes whole again.

My voice was ice. "Let go of me."

"No," he rasped, stubborn as a wolf with its jaws locked on prey.

A bitter smirk pulled at my mouth. "I have something to show you. Then I want you gone."

He hesitated, then slowly released me. “What is it?”

I slammed the thick stack of test reports into his chest.

He looked confused, but began flipping through them one by one.

With each page, I saw his pupils dilate, his breathing grow ragged, his hands start to shake violently.

“No... this can’t be real. I don’t believe it.”

But the tears betrayed him, spilling over even as he denied it.

Then his knees buckled, and he collapsed with a thud at my feet.

He clutched my waist like a drowning man clinging to the last piece of driftwood, sobbing, “Riley... I’m sorry... I’m so, so sorry...”

I didn’t look at him. I didn’t need to. I already knew what was pouring out of his mouth—more apologies, more regret, all of it useless.

My gaze stayed fixed on the far end of the hospital corridor. People passed by, some staring at us with curiosity or pity. I couldn’t care less.

I was already dying.

What use was anyone’s opinion?

When he looked up at me again, he froze.

I saw the horror in his eyes at the emptiness in mine—the dead stillness that no amount of begging could stir.

Then, in a sudden burst of desperation, he grabbed my hand and slammed it against his own face.

“Hit me,” he gasped. “If it makes you feel better, keep hitting me.”

I stood there, unmoving, my hand limp in his grip.

His voice cracked, and the sound was almost feral. “If I’d known what my actions would do to you—how they would shorten

0

0

Chapter 238

your life, tear you apart—I never would have...”

Too late.

Always too late.

No matter how he clawed at the past, it wouldn't change. He had set the trap, and now I was rotting in it.

He kept forcing my hand to strike him again and again.

Smack. Smack. Smack.

PINT

ich

The sharp sound echoed down the hall, drawing more stares.

1

D

Red marks bloomed across his pale skin, but I felt nothing.

I was no longer the girl who could feel anything for him—only the poisoned wolf, counting down the days until her body gave out completely.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[816 words]

Chapter 239

Third Person's POV

Mia's patience finally snapped. With a sharp step forward, she shoved Ronan Duskcliff hard.

He hadn't expected it, and the force sent him sprawling onto the cold, unforgiving floor.

+5 Free Coins

Mia's hands immediately went to Riley's, cupping them with care. Her eyes darkened when she saw the damage-her palms were raw, flushed a furious red, and already swelling.

Rage sparked in Mia's chest. She turned her gaze on Ronan, and the look she gave him could have frozen a full-grown wolf in its tracks.

"If you truly wanted to atone, you'd stop haunting my Miss like a curse," she hissed, her voice cutting as steel. "You know she despises you. And yet you keep clawing your way back into her life. That's not penance-that's cruelty."

She thrust Riley's wounded hand toward him, as if daring him to look. "Tell me, Alpha's son-was this punishment for yourself... or just another way to hurt her?"

Ronan's gaze locked onto her palm, and a pain sharper than silver spread through his chest. He shook his head, desperate, speechless-his wolf howling inside him, but finding no words to bridge the gulf he'd created.

He stared at Riley, eyes flooded with plea and regret, yet she wouldn't spare him so much as a glance.

His chest tightened, breath growing shallow. His wolf thrashed against its cage of guilt, but even so, not a single apology made it past his lips.

To Mia, the sight was nothing but empty theater.

Where had all this so-called love been before?

Riley had proven her innocence time and again since leaving the prison, yet Ronan had never believed her -not once. Instead, he'd stood beside Scarlett, shielding her like a favored mate.

That wasn't love. That was poison in silk's disguise.

Mia's gaze swept over him with cold contempt before she wrapped a steady arm around Riley and walked her past him.

Ronan's hand shot out, grasping for her-but he caught only air.

He tried to follow, to force one last chance at redemption, but his stomach twisted violently and his chest burned as if pierced by a blade.

With a hollow thud, he collapsed to the ground, his wolf's eyes still locked on Riley's retreating figure.

“Riley-!”

1/3

8:14 pm ADD

Chapter 239

+5 Free Coins

She never turned back. She left him there in the dust of the hospital corridor, the bonds between them in ruins.

Outside Mooncrest Hospital, Riley walked beside Mia, her steps mechanical, as though moving through fog.

They were almost to the bus stop when something by the trash bins caught Riley’s attention.

A man-no legs, only stumps beneath ragged trousers-was picking through heaps of refuse with trembling hands.

At last, he unearthed a mold-speckled bun, clutching it as though it were gold, devouring it in desperate bites.

His clothes were filthy, hair matted into knots from months-perhaps years-without washing. He kept his head bowed, long strands hiding most of his face.

Flies swarmed in the damp autumn air, but he seemed oblivious.

Riley’s gaze softened despite herself.

In the wolf packs, some pups were born into gold-lined dens, destined for strength and status. Others were born into hunger and blood, every step a fight to survive.

This man-though young from what little of his skin she could see-had already lost more than most could bear. No legs meant no hunt, no run, no freedom. Only scavenging, just to keep breathing.

Autumn’s chill wasn’t yet biting, but winter would be merciless.

A bitter smile ghosted across Riley’s lips. Her own life was shattered beyond repair-what right did she have to pity another?

And yet... perhaps because she knew what it was to walk through darkness with no hand to hold, she could not look away.

She stepped into a nearby convenience store and returned moments later with bread and water. She'd left herself only enough coins for bus fare; the rest she placed in the paper bag.

Kneeling slightly, she set the offering before him. "That bun's gone bad. You'll get sick. Take this instead."

Inside the bag was not just food and water-but money.

The man froze mid-bite.

He went rigid, as though struck by lightning, and did not lift his head. Beneath the tangle of hair, his eyes -hidden-were wide with something fierce and raw: fear, shame, disbelief.

Riley bent further, voice gentle as snowfall. "It's alright. Take it."

Still, he didn't move. His thin frame trembled, and for a moment she wondered if he'd been beaten enough times to fear even a kind hand.

2/3

Don't be afraid. I mean you no harm."

She reached to take the ruined bun from his hand.

pup.

The man's gaze flicked to her fingers-slender, pale, and bloodless from cold-and something in him cracked. His wolf's heart clenched with a sudden, unbearable ache, and tears broke free before he could stop them.

3/3

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[787 words]

Chapter 240

Chapter 240

His tear fell with a soft plop, landing squarely on the back of Riley's hand.

+5 Free Coins

She froze, a pang of sorrow twisting in her chest. In that instant, she thought-this man must have been starved of warmth for so long that even the smallest flicker of kindness from a stranger had bloomed into something vast and overwhelming inside him, enough to draw tears.

Riley took a deep breath, snatched the moldy bun from his grip, and tossed it into the garbage. Then she shoved the bread, water, and the bills into his arms.

From start to finish, the man never once lifted his head to look at her, never spoke a word.

Riley had been about to offer a few words of encouragement, but just then, the bus arrived.

"Miss, let's get on," Mia urged, gently tugging her.

Riley cast the man one last deep glance before boarding the bus with Mia.

It wasn't until the bus had rumbled away from the stop that the man finally gathered the courage to raise his head. His face came into view-Maddox.

That night, battered and barely conscious, he'd been dragged to the hospital by Duke on Lucien Duskgrave's orders. The Alpha Prince of Stormridge had commanded that Maddox's legs be taken. But when the doctor saw him, they revealed the truth-both legs had already been smashed to pulp. His bones were shattered beyond repair, shards piercing through skin and muscle.

Even without Lucien's order, amputation had been inevitable.

When Maddox was wheeled out of the operating room, both legs were gone from the thigh down. When the anesthetic wore off, he awoke to agony so raw it stole his breath. The moment he realized what had been done to him, the world went gray.

He had no coin to pay for his treatment. The hospital kept him one day before casting him out. Even his wheelchair vanished, leaving him to drag himself across the ground with what was left of his body.

By day, he scavenged in trash heaps. By night, he curled up on park benches. A life worse than a stray dog's.

And yet nothing cut him deeper than seeing Riley again like this.

She hadn't recognized him.

Spirits above, he wanted to reveal himself-wanted to tell her everything. But in this state? Legless, filthy, broken? How could he?

He clutched the bag she'd given him to his chest, his eyes glued to the bus as it carried her away. Tears streamed unchecked down his gaunt face.

Kiley. I was wrong

1/2

8:14 pm

Chapter 240

+5 Free Coins

When would she forgive him? When would she remember? When would she... take him home?

Curling into the shadow of the trash bin, Maddox whispered hoarsely to the empty air, "Riley... I failed you. I'm paying for it now."

Now he knew-what it meant to have your legs smashed. The white-hot agony.

Now he knew-what it felt like to be spat on, pitied, dismissed.

Now he knew-the hollow ache of hunger.

Back then, she had worked herself to the bone, competing in every tournament during the busiest season of her schooling just to win scholarships-just to hand all her money to him so he could study in peace.

And now... she was still the same. Giving him what little she had left.

Riley... have you already forgiven me?

Images flooded his mind-Riley trailing behind him like a shadow, eyes bright with trust. And him, swearing to protect her for life.

The tears came again, unbidden.

“If I’d known it would end like this,” he rasped, “I never would’ve gone into law. Maybe if I hadn’t become a lawyer, we wouldn’t be here now.”

He muttered to himself for a long while before tearing open the bread, devouring it in desperate bites.

Riley... even for you, I have to stand up again.

When Riley returned to the Duskgrave estate with Mia, Matriarch Duskgrave was arranging flowers on the sofa. The moment she saw Riley, she set them aside and beamed warmly.

“Riley, you’re back.”

By the time she stepped inside, Riley had already smoothed her expression into something bright and easy, hiding all trace of earlier pain.

“Grandmother,” she greeted with a smile.

But the old wolf’s joy faltered the moment her gaze fell on Riley’s reddened eyes. Concern deepened the lines on her face.

“Riley... your eyes-why are they so red? Have you been crying? Did someone hurt you? Tell me, and I’ll see to it myself.”

A rush of warmth swelled in Riley’s chest, so sharp it almost brought fresh tears.

Indeed-those who truly cared could read you with a single glance. Those who didn’t... never would.

2/2

8:14 pm

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[809 words]

Chapter 241

Chapter 241

Once, in the Ebonclaw Pack, Riley had been forced under Ronan Duskcliff's command to kneel before Tessa of the Blackmaw Pack's sickbed and kowtow until her forehead split open and bled. The thick white bandage that covered her injury had been glaringly obvious, yet not a single member of the Ebonclaw Pack had spared her a glance.

Now, her eyes were merely red and faintly swollen from crying, yet the elderly Matriarch Duskgrave spotted the difference instantly.

Riley drew in a slow breath, forcing back the wave of hot emotion threatening to spill over. She lifted her face into a gentle smile and explained lightly, "A gust of wind blew some grit into my eyes just now. I rubbed them for a while, that's all."

The Matriarch's shoulders eased with relief. Riley's body was fragile-she always feared that some wolf without sense or manners might try to bully her. But even a grain of sand in the eye could cause harm. She quickly turned to Mrs. Beck. "Bring the eye drops."

"Grandmother, I'm fine, truly."

The Matriarch ignored her protests, pulling Riley down onto the sofa with an unyielding gentleness and making her rest her head upon her lap. Her arms cradled Riley's slight frame, protective and warm-like she would hold her own granddaughter.

The wolf in Riley stirred with a small, instinctive sound of contentment, her nose catching the faint, soothing scent of elder-blood pack warmth. She almost broke then, almost let the tears fall.

Before they could spill, the Matriarch tilted the small bottle, and a cool drop touched Riley's eye. Under that cover, her tears finally escaped, slipping freely down her temple.

"What's wrong?" the Matriarch asked sharply, concern flashing like a defensive snarl.

Mrs. Beck and Mia moved closer, three sets of eyes fixed on Riley.

She gave a small, light laugh. "The drops are just cold."

"Ah..." The Matriarch exhaled slowly. "Be good. Just bear with it until I'm finished."

Riley smiled and kept her gaze steady on the older woman. Each drop slid down her cheek, mingled with the salt of her own tears.

The Matriarch frowned. "Why do they keep running out?"

"Maybe my eyes don't absorb water," Riley teased softly.

That drew a small chuckle from the older wolf. "You always know how to make me smile."

Riley closed her eyes, hiding the turbulence inside her. She slid her arms around the Matriarch's waist.

"Because you're so good to me," she murmured. I want you happy every day. Even if I'm gone... you

1/2

mustn't grieve. Wolves survive without their own, and you will too. As for Lucien... he's a good man. He'll find someone better suited than me. I'm only a brief shadow in his life.

She pressed her face into the warmth of the Matriarch's lap, letting that steady, protective heartbeat soothe the restless ache inside her chest.

Feeling her cling like that melted the Matriarch's heart into something soft and unguarded. She stroked Riley's back. "Grandmother also wants you to be happy every day."

"Mhm," Riley's voice was muffled, almost drowsy.

"Did you tire yourself out playing outside?"

"A little."

"Then rest here." The Matriarch made no move to release her.

Half-sprawled in the elder's lap, Riley's frail body-unfit for the endless stamina of a healthy wolf-began to yield to exhaustion. Under the soothing rhythm of the Matriarch's touch, she drifted into a light, vulnerable sleep.

Only when she was deeply under did the Matriarch gently ease her head onto a cushion. Mia moved quickly, covering her with a light blanket.

The three women-Matriarch Duskgrave, Mrs. Beck, and Mia-stood in silence for a long moment, watching Riley's peaceful face, before stepping away with quiet, padded footsteps, like wolves leaving a sleeping pup undisturbed.

"Matriarch, what shall we prepare for dinner? The young master will be back soon," Mrs. Beck asked.

The Matriarch's gaze softened on Riley. "Cooking will wake her. Better to order food for Lucien tonight."

Mrs. Beck blinked. "...Takeout?" She doubted the Alpha prince of Stormridge had ever touched such a thing.

“And for Miss Riley?” she asked.

The Matriarch turned to Mia. “Riley loves your porridge. It’s gentle on the stomach. Cook some millet porridge-quietly.”

Once again, the depth of the Matriarch’s favoritism toward Riley shocked the two household wolves. Yet, rather than resent it, they welcomed it.

When Lucien Duskgrave returned, the household gathered at the table.

Before Riley sat a steaming bowl of thick, golden millet porridge, the grains broken down into a smooth, fragrant cream. The Matriarch had even asked Mia to steam her a delicate egg custard.

In contrast, Lucien’s place was set with four rich, heavy dishes-oily, salty, and high in heat. Even the rice looked dry and unappetizing, its lack of sheen standing in stark difference to Riley’s gentle, nourishing meal.

2/2

8:15 pm SDD

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[773 words]

Chapter 242

Chapter 242

Lucien Duskgrave’s sharp amber eyes narrowed for a fraction of a second.

“This... was made by Mrs. Beck?”

Mrs. Beck shook her head.

“Then it’s from Mia?”

Mia also shook her head.

His brow twitched. “Don’t tell me... it was you, Grandmother?”

The Matriarch smiled at him, her expression full of calm authority.

+5 Free Coins

"I specially ordered takeout for you, Lucien. The reviews for this place are excellent. Come, taste it."

Lucien fell silent.

Why... suddenly feed him takeout?

His gaze flicked to Riley's place setting-porcelain bowl filled with steaming millet porridge and a tender, glistening egg custard-before dropping to his own plate: four oil-slicked, sodium-heavy dishes, each smelling like a greasy punch to the senses.

He opened his mouth, but the words stayed lodged in his throat. Instead, he lowered his head and began

to eat.

And truth be told... the flavor wasn't bad. Grandmother had been right; the seasoning had bite, and the

meat was rich.

Night deepened, and the Mooncrest estate fell into the stillness of the sleeping Pack.

Except for Lucien.

The Alpha Prince was pacing a miserable path between his bed and the bathroom. Six trips later, his usually unshakable expression was pale and stormy, his steps unsteady. He sank onto the mattress, staring into nothing.

That morning-Riley's noodles. Cilantro. His allergy had flared.

That night-the Matriarch's carefully chosen takeout. Now he was paying the price, body purging in rebellion.

Through clenched teeth, he muttered, "Grandmother... what in the moon's name did you feed me?"

Lucien Dusgrave had been raised in the highest standards of the Stormridge Pack-no tainted food, no careless cooking, not a speck of foreign bacteria allowed past his lips. One careless evening, and his gut's balance had been shattered.

1/3

8:15 pm

Chapter 242

+5 Free Coins

That he wasn't already dehydrated into a husk was a testament to his Alpha resilience.

By the time the clock ticked past four a.m., he finally collapsed into a brief, exhausted sleep.

It lasted less than three hours.

The shrill ring of his phone carved through the predawn quiet.

He fumbled for it, voice hoarse and edged with fatigue. "What?"

"Alpha," Duke's crisp voice came through the line, "the East District project needs your personal attention today. I'll be there to pick you up shortly."

"Mm." Lucien exhaled, trying to gather himself.

Duke hesitated. "Alpha... you don't sound well."

"I'm fine." The answer was short, final. He hung up.

He forced himself upright, only for the edges of his vision to darken. He breathed through it, jaw tight, and swore silently: Never again. Never touching takeout again.

After a brisk wash, he emerged in a fitted black suit, opening his bedroom door-

-and was immediately assaulted by the fresh, unmistakable scent of cilantro.

Danger.

Downstairs, Riley greeted him with the soft, sweet smile she wore so effortlessly.

"You're up, Mr. Dusgrave? Perfect timing. I made spring noodles. Come, eat."

His eyes landed on the steaming bowl, and his instincts told him she'd been generous with the portion.

Her smile deepened. "You're up earlier today, so you don't have to rush like yesterday. Take your time. If it's not enough, there's more in the kitchen."

Lucien's jaw tightened imperceptibly. He should tell her about his allergy, he knew. But the open, hopeful light in her eyes... it made the words die before they could leave his mouth.

It's just an allergy. He'd take medicine after.

Even so, his steps toward the table were hesitant.

Just as he sat down, the doorbell rang.

Relief flickered across his gaze. Duke must have arrived early. Perfect-he could take the bowl, hand it off, and not waste Riley's kindness.

"I'll get it," he said.

Riley couldn't hear the bell, but she read his lips and quickly shook her head. "No, Mr. Duskgrave, you eat.

2/3

8:15 pm

Chapter 242

I'll get the door."

Lucien stayed seated, gaze fixed on the entryway, waiting for Duke's tall frame to appear.

The moment he saw who it was, his hopes crashed.

Not Duke. Carmen.

+5 Free Coins

The young she-wolf bounded in like an eager pup, pulling Riley into a tight embrace the instant the door opened. Her voice was full of unrestrained warmth.

"Riley, I missed you so much."

And then she bent, inhaling deeply at Riley's neck. "Mmh... you smell amazing."

Lucien's golden eyes narrowed, a strange, territorial irritation prickling under his skin.

Riley blinked in surprise. "Carmen, it's not Sunday. What are you doing here?"

Carmen grinned, pulling back but still close. "No classes this morning, so I thought I'd come see you."

3/3

8:15 pm

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[742 words]

Chapter 243

Chapter 243

+5 Free Coins

Carmen's voice carried a playful lilt as she looked at Riley. "From now on, whenever I don't have class, I'll come see you, alright?"

She looked every bit the carefree, mischievous girl, yet in her eyes there was a fleeting flash of something deeper-concern, protectiveness, and an unspoken vow. She just wanted to see Riley smile.

Riley's expression softened, as though speaking to a child she cherished. She ruffled Carmen's hair with gentle fingers. "Of course. I'd love nothing more than to see you every day."

How could she not like someone as pure as Carmen? The girl's presence alone lightened her mood.

Riley took her hand and led her inside. "Sit down for a moment. There's still noodles in the pot. I'll get you a bowl."

"You're too good to me," Carmen teased, grinning wide. "If I were a man, I'd snatch you up and marry you."

Riley shot her a mock glare. "You talk too much."

Carmen only stuck out her tongue in reply, her scent-light and sweet-mingling with Riley's calm, warm presence. The two of them moved like they'd known each other all their lives, a closeness that made Lucien Duskgrave's eyelids twitch.

When Carmen passed him, she merely nodded in greeting before trotting after Riley into the kitchen.

From the kitchen came Riley's voice, steady and low, "Why are you following me in here?"

Carmen leaned against the counter, her tone turning syrupy. "Because I finally get to see you. I'm not wasting a second."

Her playful whine coaxed a quiet laugh from Riley, the sound carrying like a warm ember in the winter air. The two continued chatting, the kitchen filling with the easy rhythm of their words-while Lucien sat alone at the table, feeling almost like an intruder in his own territory.

That was when Duke walked in from outside.

"Alpha, are we ready to go?"

Carmen froze mid-step, the voice cutting through her lighthearted mood like a blade. It sounded far too familiar.

She turned, eyes narrowing toward the dining room-where a man in a silver-gray suit and gold-rimmed glasses was walking toward them with smooth, confident steps.

Recognition struck her like lightning.

It was him. The man who had once handed her a million without blinking-Theo Hale's and Kael Vale's ally. What in the moon's name was he doing here, calling Lucien "Alpha"?

1/2

8:15 pm D

Chapter 243

Her heart thudded wildly, wolf instincts coiling tight.

+5 Free Coins

As if sensing her gaze, Duke glanced toward the kitchen. Carmen jerked her head away immediately, shoulders stiff, every muscle tensed as though ready to bolt.

His eyes lingered on her, assessing. Something about her back looked... familiar.

Before he could speak, Riley emerged with a steaming bowl of noodles. "This is Carmen, Mia's daughter."

Mia's daughter? She looked around Riley's age.

The name tickled at his memory-Carmen. He stared longer, the shape of her shoulders, the line of her jaw, his instincts prodding him to press further.

But Riley's voice broke the tension. "Duke, have you eaten? Want to sit and have some?"

He opened his mouth to answer, but Lucien's deep voice cut through from the table.

"He's eaten."

Lucien stood, sweeping the bowl of noodles in front of him as if claiming prey. "The Eastside project is urgent. I'll take this and eat on the road. Duke, let's go."

Without another glance, he strode out, Duke casting one last long look at Carmen before following.

Outside, Lucien thrust the noodles into Duke's hands.

"For you."

Duke looked down. A lush heap of fresh cilantro floated on the broth. He couldn't help the smirk tugging at his lips. "Such a shame, Alpha. Best part of the dish, and you can't have it."

Lucien slid into the driver's seat with the slow menace of a predator turning its head. "Seems I've been docking your pay too lightly."

"Oh?" Duke raised a brow, amused.

"Your mouth still runs even when it's full."

Duke's chuckle died instantly.

Back inside, Carmen finally let out the breath she'd been holding. She carried her bowl to the table, but instead of sitting beside Riley, she deliberately took the seat across-so she could read her lips.

As they ate, she kept her tone casual, but her heart was still beating a little too fast. "Riley... the man who came in earlier-who is he?"

"That's Alpha Lucien's Beta. Duke,"

2/2

8:15 pm D

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[832 words]

Chapter 244

Chapter 244

Carmen froze when she heard Riley's answer, her chopsticks suspended mid-air.

So.... Duke was one of Lucien Duskgrave's people?

Then why had he been running with Theo Hale?

+5 Free Coins

Her mind snapped back to the day she'd conned Duke out of a hundred thousand credits. The heat of unease curled low in her stomach.

She had no qualms about bleeding arrogant, predatory Alphas for every coin they were worth-wolves like that deserved it. But Duke... he had been different. Quiet. Sharp-eyed. Protective of Riley.

And Carmen had never wanted to cheat anyone who might protect Riley.

Now the money burned in her memory like a brand. She wanted it gone-back in Duke's hands before Riley ever found out. Because if Riley learned she'd taken it, there would be more than disappointment in those storm-gray eyes. There would be distance.

She ducked her head, emotions shifting too fast to name. Mechanically, she kept lifting noodles to her lips, but every bite tasted like ash.

After the meal, Carmen stayed to help Riley clear the dishes.

She was quiet-unnaturally so-and because Riley's hearing was lost to the world, she didn't speak much either.

The kitchen was filled only with the sound of running water and the faint clink of ceramic.

When everything was put away, Riley led her into the embroidery room.

It was where Riley lived, aside from the necessary hours spent eating and sleeping.

Bolts of colored thread filled the shelves, sunlight catching on their sheen. Riley sat at her frame, hands steady and precise, pulling life from silk with each stroke of the needle.

Carmen's chest ached.

—

Riley excelled at everything she touched, even this a skill she had learned behind iron bars, in a place where wolves were stripped of rank, name, and pride. In five short years she had risen to a master's level, yet if she'd never been caged with her brilliance, an Mooncrest High graduate like her could have ruled any path she chose

Carmen took a seat nearby, her gaze fixed on Riley. The morning sun spilled over Riley's shoulders, turning her hair to molten gold, her skin to porcelain. She looked like something out of an old noble's portrait—an Alpha's daughter born in another century.

Unable to resist, Carmen pulled out her phone and snapped a picture. She tucked it away quickly, then sat again in silence, mind racing

1/3

Chapter 244

She had to find a way to return Duke's money.

+5 Free Coins

And she had to figure out how to make enough in one year to fund her escape abroad, all before Riley finished this massive piece.

By the time she surfaced from her thoughts, it was already midday.

Carmen stayed for lunch with Riley before heading straight back to Ashmoor Academy.

That afternoon passed in its usual rhythm—Riley stitching, Carmen sitting through lectures.

When the sun dipped low, bleeding orange across the horizon, Carmen left class to find her phone buzzing.

She didn't bother masking her irritation when she answered.

"Carmen, miss me?" The voice on the other end was slick with false charm.

"If you've got something worth saying, spit it," she snapped.

There was a pause. "...Wow. Harsh."

In the Hale household, Jace Hale sat with his father and older brother, phone on speaker. Carmen's voice crackled through the room, drawing a round of laughter from both the elder and younger Hale men.

The reason for the speakerphone was simple-this was a "family meeting," called by Alpha Hale himself, with one purpose: deciding which son would finally step into the company and prepare to inherit the pack's sprawling business empire.

Theo Hale leaned back in his chair, uninterested. "I'm a doctor. I'm not trading my work for boardrooms and power games."

"I'm too young," Jace said lazily. "I want to play a few more years. You're nowhere near retirement, Dad- why panic now?"

The Alpha's growl was low and sharp. "Because one son hides in a clinic and the other runs wild with rogues and drunkards. When I step down, which of you will lead? You think I can hand the pack to strangers?"

Jace grinned at his brother. "You should quit the clinic. Running the pack's business empire would give you more time for golf. And my luxury-filled life depends on you, big brother."

Theo shot him a flat look. "I heal people. I don't run companies. You go."

"I'd rather have my fangs pulled."

"Then neither of us will."

Alpha Hale's nostrils flared. The very idea that the future of the Hale Pack-the empire his forefathers had built-might crumble because his heirs refused the call... it was almost enough to make his wolf rise.

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Chapter 244

+5 Free Coins

"Fine," he said at last, voice dripping with menace. "If you won't inherit, you'll marry. And then you'll give me grandpups. If I can't trust my sons, I'll raise my successors from the cradle."

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Jace Hale's mind instantly conjured up Carmen's striking face-beautiful, yes, but with a sharpness in her eyes that promised she could gut a man without breaking a sweat.

He swallowed hard. Winning over a she-wolf like her would not be a short hunt; it would be a long, dangerous chase, the kind that left teeth marks on your soul.

So, with that thought, he spoke. "Why go through all that trouble, Dad? You're only fifty. Why don't you and Mom just have another pup for us? Give me and Theo a little brother. Right, Theo?"

Theo Hale nodded without hesitation. "Jace is right. Dad, instead of waiting for us to settle down, you should get to work on expanding the pack yourself."

The words hit Alpha Hale like a double blow to the ribs.

"You two little bastards," he snarled, his Alpha authority crackling in his voice, "all day long you avoid real responsibilities-no running the company, no mates, no pups-what the hell do you plan to do with your

lives?"

Then his sharp amber gaze locked on Theo. "Especially you, Theo. Your brother's still young and stupid, but you're pushing thirty. You've never even had a mate. Tell me the truth-do you even like females?"

Theo's jaw tightened. "...Dad, what are you talking about? I don't have a mate because I'm busy working. How does that make me into someone who prefers males?"

Theo scoffed. "Jace doesn't have a mate, and you're not accusing him of anything."

“I do have mates,” Jace fired back instantly. “Well... I had one. Just broke up. If I wanted another, I could have one in minutes.”

Theo’s smirk was pure provocation. “Sure you could.”

“I’m not bluffing. This wolf’s charm is lethal when I want it to be.”

Alpha Hale’s eyes gleamed. “Is that so?”

“Obviously,” Jace replied, lifting his chin with pride.

Theo cut in with a wolfish grin. “Why don’t you prove it? Call her. Let us hear.”

“Fine. Watch and learn,” Jace said, pulling out his phone-only to have it snatched away by Theo in one swift, predatory move.

The top of his contacts list revealed a pinned name: My Goddess Carmen.

Well, well.

If a she-wolf had earned the title of “Goddess” from the cocky Jace Hale, she must have sunk her claws deep into him.

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Theo, without an ounce of mercy, tapped the call button and flicked it to speaker.

+5 Free Coins

Jace’s pulse spiked. His wolf wanted to bolt. He moved to end the call, but before he could, Carmen’s voice came through-cool and unamused.

“Yeah? What do you want?”

Jace forced his voice into something casual. “Carmen, miss me?”

Surely, she’d soften at his tone. Surely-

“Cut the crap.”

The words hit harder than claws to the throat.

Jace's face flushed crimson while Alpha Hale and Theo nearly doubled over laughing.

When the laughter finally died down, the Alpha's look said it all: This is your idea of a strong pull with females?

Jace wanted the floor to open up and swallow him whole. Still, he forced a tight smile. "That's just... playful banter between mates. You old wolves don't understand young romance."

Neither Alpha Hale nor Theo bought it. The irritation in Carmen's voice had been sharp as fangs.

"What? You don't believe me?" Jace challenged, puffing up.

Theo's grin widened into something predatory. "If you can get her to come here, we'll believe you. Right, Dad?"

Alpha Hale nodded. "Your brother's right."

The Alpha's priorities had narrowed to two things: securing the family's legacy and seeing his sons mated.

Years ago, he hadn't worried. His sons had the looks, the status, the bloodline-females should have been lining up to be marked. But now? Theo was nearing thirty without even a shadow of a mate bond, and Jace... well, Jace cycled through she-wolves like a restless predator that never claimed territory.

Worse, the younger one ran with dangerous company. Only weeks ago, he'd come home bloodied, his head split open after a fight. The Alpha had no illusions-one day, that recklessness could get him killed.

If a steady she-wolf like Carmen could anchor him, the Alpha would welcome it.

"What's this girl's background?" Alpha Hale asked.

Jace hesitated, then said, "Student at Ashmoor Academy."

The Alpha's brows rose. That alone elevated Carmen in his eyes. Only the most disciplined and intelligent wolves-or humans-earned a place there. If his son could bond with such a female, the Alpha would throw the full weight of the Hale family's approval behind her.

2/2

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Chapter 246

The Alpha Hale's smile softened, a calculating warmth glinting in his eyes.

"Well, it just so happens we've got nothing pressing at home today. Why don't you invite that girl over?"

Jace Hale felt his stomach sink. It wasn't that he didn't want to bring Carmen here-Moon above, if it were that easy, he would've done it long ago. But Carmen was not the type to come running just because someone asked; she was all claws and teeth, and she answered to no one.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Mooncrest, Carmen stood at the base of the lecture hall steps, her phone pressed to her ear. The line had gone dead. No voice, no excuse, just silence.

Her mood, already simmering, curdled further. With an exasperated huff, she hung up, shoving the device into her jacket pocket and stalking toward the campus dining hall.

The scent of dozens of wolves-young, restless, and loud-hit her before she even stepped inside. Noon rush. Lines snaked past the counters. Carmen stood in the queue, her sharp gaze fixed ahead, until finally she had her prize: a steaming bowl of beef noodle soup, the broth rich and fragrant.

She carried it to a shadowed corner, set down her tray, and began to eat in peace. Or she tried to.

Whispers slithered to her ears from the next table over.

"Look at her."

"Tch. Heard she was some Alpha's kept whore. Disgusting."

"Right? Still has the face to show up here. If it were me, I'd have crawled into a hole by now."

"Being kept sounds pretty damn good to me-get paid to lie around? She's got it easy, and she's rich. Isn't that right?"

Their laughter grated like claws on stone.

Carmen's chopsticks paused for the briefest flicker of a moment, her golden eyes narrowing. Then, as if the words hadn't even touched her, she resumed eating.

Gossip was old news. Venom had been spat her way for years; she'd built up her own kind of armor. In less than a year, she and Riley would be gone from this place. These petty jackals weren't worth her time.

But apparently, ignoring them only emboldened them. A scrap of scallion landed on her shoulder. Then a clove of garlic. Then a piece of ginger root.

The scent of onions and broth clung to her hair and skin, invasive and sour.

Slowly, Carmen set down her chopsticks. She rose, bowl in hand, turned-

-and in one fluid motion, upended the remaining noodles over the head of the girl behind her.

A shriek tore through the dining hall, sharp as a wolf's death cry. Heads turned-those eating, those in line

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-every pair of eyes drawn to the spectacle.

Noodles clung to the girl's hair, broth dripping down her face, her expression a mix of outrage and disbelief.

Carmen dropped the empty bowl onto the table with a dull thud and turned to leave.

"Carmen! Don't you dare walk away!" one of the girl's friends barked.

She didn't even glance back.

Being ignored in front of so many witnesses seemed to snap the girl's temper. "Are you deaf? You humiliated my friend and think you can just—"

She lunged, fingers clawing for Carmen's hair.

But Carmen was already moving. She caught the girl's wrist mid-strike, her grip like iron, and in a single fluid motion flipped her clean over her shoulder.

The girl hit the ground with a bone-jarring thud.

Carmen's boot came down on her chest, pinning her like prey beneath a predator's paw.

"Had enough of your little performance?" Her voice was low, edged with frost.

The girl wheezed under the pressure, her face flushed crimson.

Carmen looked down at her, gaze cold and unblinking, the way an Alpha might regard a trespasser on her territory—calm, patient, and promising violence.

"I—I'm sorry..." the girl choked out, tears springing to her eyes.

Carmen's lips curved in a humorless smile. "Pathetic. You need to be beaten to remember your place."

Gasps rippled through the crowd.

No one had ever seen this side of her—the dangerous, coiled force that lived beneath her polished, academic exterior.

One wolf in the crowd dared to speak up. "Carmen, that's enough. Everyone saw. If this gets to the Dean, you could be expelled."

"Tell her," Carmen said with a derisive snort.

She stepped away, but another voice called after her, sharper, colder. "You hit someone and still think you're untouchable? You're not fit to call yourself a wolf."

Carmen stopped. Slowly, she turned, each step toward the speaker a deliberate, prowling threat.

The girl's bravado wilted instantly. "Wh-what are you doing?"

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+5 Free Coins

Carmen didn't answer. She simply drew back her hand and slapped her hard across the face, the crack echoing off the walls. Then she grabbed the nearest plate of cold leftovers and slammed it into the girl's

face.

“This,” Carmen said, her voice a razor-edged whisper, “is what untouchable looks like.”

Rice and broth dripped from the girl’s chin, her makeup smeared beyond recognition. She was too stunned to even defend herself, her eyes welling as she began to cry.

Around them, mutters of disapproval rose, but Carmen didn’t spare them a glance.

Her temper had been a hair trigger lately-ever since Riley’s troubles had begun, it had been harder to keep the wolf under her skin from answering insults with teeth.

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[780 words]

Chapter 247

Chapter 247

Anyone foolish enough to provoke Carmen always ended up as her personal punching bag.

If Riley’s nature was pure and unyieldingly kind, Carmen was her perfect opposite-pure venom, honed cruelty wrapped in a deceptively human shell. She moved through the cafeteria with the lethal stride of a predator, her dominance so tangible that the three girls passing by her froze mid-step. They plastered on saccharine smiles, but Carmen didn’t so much as glance at them, gliding past without a flicker of acknowledgment.

Only after she disappeared through the doors did the trio release shaky breaths, exchanging wide-eyed glances. They knew the truth of her nature better than anyone. Once, she used to put on a sweet façade outside the dorms. Now, she didn’t bother hiding the wolf beneath the skin.

Those two idiots who had poked her today? They’d practically begged to be hunted.

A short while later, Carmen pushed open the door to the Principal’s office, not bothering to knock. She strolled inside with the insolence of an alpha walking into her own den, dropping into the couch like she owned it.

“I just beat up three girls in the cafeteria,” she said flatly, her gaze as cold as moonlit snow. “They might come whining to you soon. You know what to do.”

The Principal's stomach knotted at the sight of her. Were it not for the noose she'd strung around his neck, he would have thrown her out long ago. But now, with his secrets-his sordid affairs with a student- curled in her claws, all he could do was bare his teeth in a weak smile.

"Don't worry, Carmen. I know."

"Good," she smirked, sharp and humorless. "Then I'll leave the clean-up to you."

He kept that false smile plastered on his face until she was gone. Only then did his expression curdle into misery. Damn Kael Vale. If he'd known Carmen would become this much of a thorn, he never would have taken his bribe and schemed to expel her over 'conduct violations.' Kael had changed his mind at the last minute, and now here he was-collared by a wolf in human form.

Half an hour later, just as Carmen predicted, three battered girls came storming in to demand justice. The Principal took one look at their tear-streaked, noodle-smearred faces, and his simmering frustration boiled over. He slammed a palm onto his desk and unleashed a tirade so loud it shook the windows. The girls stood frozen, blinking through their tears, unable to fathom why the supposed victims were being flayed alive instead of comforted.

Carmen left campus with her temper still smoldering, every passerby looking like prey in her eyes. She was halfway to deciding where to cool her head when the roar of an engine split the air.

A sleek black motorcycle screeched to a stop in front of her, the scent of gasoline and adrenaline mingling with the driver's wild, untamed alpha musk. The man dismounted with the easy arrogance of someone who'd never lost a fight, tugging off his helmet to reveal unruly hair and a smirk that carried the sting of

mischief.

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Chapter 247

"Carmen," Jace Hale greeted, voice pitched low like a wolf coaxing another into trouble.

Her gaze was cool, indifferent. "What do you want?"

+5 Free Coins

Jace had originally been sent by his father to bring Carmen to the Hale estate, but plans had shifted. A call from his friends had pulled him toward something more exciting-a

street race, with the added bait that his ex, the oh-so-perfect Selene Ashford, would be there.

Selene Ashford. The female who had dared to dump him.

It wasn't love that had driven him to drink after the breakup; it was pride. An alpha's pride. And it burned. Now, he had a plan. If he brought Carmen-sharp, dangerous Carmen-it would sting Selene's ego and salve his own.

"I'm headed to a race," he said, leaning casually on the handlebars. "Come with me."

"Not interested."

She turned to leave, but his voice caught her. "What'll it take to change your mind?"

Carmen paused mid-step, one brow lifting. "Money."

That one million she'd been denied still left a sour taste. She needed new prey to bleed, and Jace was ripe for the taking.

"How much?" he asked, already grinning.

"How much are you willing to give?"

"That depends on your performance," he replied smoothly. "Act as my girlfriend tonight, and I'll give you ten grand. How's that?"

Ten thousand in one night. Easy prey, easy kill.

Carmen's lips curled-not in a smile, but in the kind of expression a wolf makes when it scents blood on the wind.

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Carmen hardly hesitated before readily agreeing.

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Jace Hale handed over the helmet, and Carmen took it steadily, securing it on her head with practiced ease. Then, without fuss, she climbed onto the bike behind him, her hands naturally wrapping around his

waist.

Jace lowered his gaze, catching sight of the firm grip at his hips. A slow, involuntary smile curved his lips, and his eyes gleamed with an unrestrained joy.

“Carmen, you’re holding on tight,” he teased softly.

With a subtle twist of the throttle, the bike growled—a deep, powerful rumble like a beast awakening from slumber—propelling them fast toward the eastern outskirts.

The roads near Mooncrest’s Eastside were mostly empty, thanks to the new development project underway. The wide, smooth pavement stretched like a racetrack designed for speed and dominance.

By the time Jace and Carmen arrived at the starting line, a crowd had already gathered—almost entirely male, save for one woman who stood out sharply.

She was young, barely out of her twenties, dressed in a flowing white dress that contrasted sharply with the throng of rough wolf men. Her long black hair fell straight and glossy over her shoulders, and her face bore the faintest touch of makeup that highlighted her pure, untouched beauty—like a white lotus blooming amidst thorny brambles.

Carmen’s heart clenched with a deep loathing the moment she saw her.

Not for any surface reason, but because the woman’s look and aura mirrored Scarlett perfectly. The innocent facade masking a heart of venom—capable of poisoning everything in her path, including Carmen herself.

Scarlett’s shadow had darkened Carmen’s past, and she bore no affection for any woman who shared that poisonous charm.

As Carmen stepped off the bike, two men quickly jogged up to her.

“Carmen.”

“Carmen’s here.”

She recognized them faintly—Jace’s packmates, the same two who had once tried to corner her in a bar’s dark bathroom, only to end up with bloody wounds after Carmen

fought back with a knife and a broken bottle. Names she didn't know, but faces she never forgot,

Carmen responded with a brief hum, her face an unreadable mask of cool detachment.

Her icy demeanor immediately drew attention from another group standing nearby,

They scrutinized her from head to toe-simple white shirt, jeans, and white sneakers-like a naive college

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+5 Free Coins

girl just out of Halston Academy.

One of the men smirked and threw out a taunt, "Hey! Is this Jace Hale's new girlfriend? Still in school, huh?"

Another joined in with a sneer, "Girl, don't let that serious face fool you. Jace isn't exactly a saint."

Laughter erupted around them.

The woman in white-the lotus among wolves-stared at Carmen without blinking.

Carmen saw the hostility burning in her eyes but remained unmoved, refusing to acknowledge the provocation.

Her indifferent silence only irritated the men further.

"Hey beautiful, how about you introduce yourself?"

Mortimer who spoke popped a piece of gum, pulling the white-dressed woman closer into his embrace, his gaze daring Jace.

Jace's jaw tightened, a flash of fury sparking in his dark eyes.

Selene-always Selene-had dumped him, only to throw herself into the arms of his fiercest rival.

Jace stepped forward, placing himself protectively in front of Carmen.

“If it’s a race you want, then race. Cut the crap.”

The challengers’ eyes glinted with predatory amusement, as if they had just spotted fresh prey.

“Sure, a race it is. But we’re changing the rules this time.”

Jace frowned, wary. “What kind of rules?”

Mortimer smirked wickedly, fixing his gaze on Carmen with a hint of malice.

“This time, each rider carries a woman. If I lose, I hand over my woman to you. If you lose, you hand over yours to me. What do you say?”

Jace’s face went pale with rage, ready to refuse outright, but a sudden tug on his arm stopped him.

Carmen’s lips curled into a cryptic smile-half amusement, half challenge-as she looked directly at the

man.

“Fine.”

If they wanted to play dirty, she would gladly oblige.

“Carmen,” Jace said with concern, “the speeds will be fast. You might not be used to it.”

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“I’m fine.”

She climbed back onto the bike.

Across from them, Selene settled coquettishly on her rider’s bike, her gaze sharp and mocking as if to say, “You’re going to lose.”

But winning or losing wasn’t Carmen’s goal tonight—she was waiting for the right moment to strike.

Both sides readied themselves.

With a sharp command, “Go!”

Two bikes tore forward like wolves unleashed-fast, fierce, and hungry for the hunt.

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- in Vengeance 249

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The motorcycles roared forward at blinding speed, slicing through the air with a fierce whistle. Carmen held Jace Hale’s waist tightly, feeling the heat radiating from his body and the intense vibrations pounding through the bike’s frame as it tore across the open road.

The world blurred, rushing backward in a dizzying rush.

The two bikes raced neck and neck, neither willing to yield an inch.

Ahead, a sharp curve appeared. Suddenly, Jace shouted, “Carmen, hold on tight!”

Her grip around his waist tightened instinctively.

Without slowing down, Jace leaned into the turn with a masterful precision.

Their bodies tilted together with the bike, carving out a sleek, thrilling arc through the bend.

In that perfect moment, they surged past their rival-a clean, graceful overtake that left the other man and Selene far behind.

The engines thundered over the empty stretch, echoing off the open landscape.

Jace's voice rang out, electrified with exhilaration. "Carmen, how's that for a rush?"

For once, a rare smile flickered beneath Carmen's helmet-a fleeting, haunting glimpse of softness that made her even more captivating.

She was about to answer when suddenly a black Maybach appeared in her line of sight.

That car was all too familiar-the vehicle of Duke.

As the motorcycles and the Maybach brushed past each other, Duke's sharp eyes caught a glimpse of Carmen. His pupils constricted sharply.

Though her face was hidden beneath the helmet, the clothes she wore were unmistakable. Duke had seen her that very morning in the Duskgrave kitchen-same outfit, same silhouette.

His gaze tracked the speeding bike, desperate to catch a clearer look, but the furious speed quickly put the rider out of reach.

Duke instinctively pressed harder on the accelerator-but just then, a deafening swarm of motorcycle engines roared up behind him.

Six or seven black bikes flashed past like bolts of lightning, quickly filling the wide road and leaving no room for escape.

Duke had no choice but to ease off the gas.

Watching the wild pack of riders ahead, he thought to himself: It must be my imagination.

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+5 Free Coins

Carmen was Mia's daughter and was close to Riley-there was no way she'd be running with these reckless street wolves.

Maybe it was just the coincidence of similar clothing.

With that rationalization, Duke let go of the chase, slowing his car to let the black-clad pack streak away.

Up front, Jace Hale's bike tore through the road like a hunting wolf.

His lithe form leaned forward, hands steady on the handlebars, eyes sharp behind the helmet's visor, glowing bright with fierce joy.

He'd gone all out today to impress Carmen, showing off his expert skills with every twist and turn. There was no doubt he looked absolutely killer right now.

A triumphant smile tugged at Jace's lips as he called out, "Carmen, how's my riding?"

He waited eagerly for praise, imagining her voice dripping with admiration.

Instead, Carmen's reply came cold and flat, "Sharp curve ahead. If you don't want to die, focus on the road."

Jace: "..."

Carmen was still as indifferent as ever.

Yet strangely, her ruthless coolness was intoxicating to him—irresistible.

Born into privilege, Jace had never been challenged like this before. Women flocked to him, flattering and fawning, but none had dared speak to him with such bluntness.

Carmen was like a fierce, wild light breaking into his dull, pampered world, and he was hopelessly drawn in.

He never imagined he'd fall for a woman so cold, so merciless—and yet she'd completely won him over.

Even when she scolded him, he found a strange pleasure in it, wondering if he might have a bit of a masochist streak—because every time Carmen snapped at him, his spirits lifted.

But Carmen was oblivious to Jace's tangled feelings.

The bikes surged through the bend, Carmen's arms tightening around Jace's solid waist.

She glanced back instinctively, finding no sign of Duke's car. Relief flooded her chest.

Good-she'd shaken him off.

She was terrified Duke might recognize her and report back to Riley.

Riley was too good, too pure-Carmen could never show her this side, not if she wanted to protect that fragile light.

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That was why, around Riley, Carmen always played the obedient girl.

+5 Free Coins

Not just a mask-when with Riley, her heart truly calmed, and the cold hardness she wore around others melted away.

Like a black lightning bolt, the motorcycle ripped across the empty highway.

Without surprise, Jace Hale and Carmen crossed the finish line first.

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Jace Hale ripped off his helmet, tousled hair wild and untamed like a wolf shaking off the wind. He shot Carmen a cocky glance, eyes gleaming with fierce pride.

“Carmen, how’s that? Feel the thrill? Think I’m worthy enough to be your mate?”

Carmen’s face was a still, cold lake-calm and unreadable.

Slow and deliberate, she drew out her comm talisman, flicked it open, and brought up her payment seal.

“Pay up.”

The confident smile on Jace’s lips snapped shut like a trap.

“Carmen, you’re brutal! I was just showing off, and you can’t spare me even a shred of praise? You wound me deep.”

Her hawk-like eyes pierced him, sharp and unyielding.

Jace’s heart slammed hard against his ribs, his face flushing beneath her stare.

He quickly lowered his head, pretending to fiddle with his own talisman-but inside, his pulse raced wild and untamed.

Damn her cold gaze-it's like being stared down by a hunting alpha. I'm hooked. I want more of that icy fire. If only she'd focus that look on me alone.

Flustered, he sent the wolf-coin purse to Carmen-enough to cover a month's worth of status as her mate.

"Wolf-coin transfer complete: Three hundred thousand silver."

The crisp chime echoed. Carmen blinked, slightly caught off guard.

"What's this?"

Jace chuckled sheepishly, scratching his neck.

"Heh, didn't you say ten thousand silver a day for being my mate? Here's 300 thousand-make it thirty days. How's that sound?"

A faint, almost hidden curve tugged at Carmen's lips-a rare flicker of amusement.

For a heartbeat, she found his awkward sincerity almost... endearing.

She stepped closer, grasping his collar, forcing his head down so their eyes met.

Jace's heart tripped, heat flooding his cheeks, ears burning crimson.

"C-Carmen, what are you?" He stammered, thoughts racing with reckless images. Was she about to seal this with a kiss? I'm not ready!

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But if Carmen was taking the lead, he surrendered.

Eyes closing, he puckered his lips nervously, eager and trembling for her touch.

Carmen held back a smile at his goofy eagerness and said with icy coolness,

+5 Free Coins

“Thirty days pass, and if you still want a mate-and the coin’s good-I’m yours whenever you call.”

She released him with a shove that shattered his fantasy.

Jace stared after her, deflated and wounded.

He’d just gifted 300 thousand silver to her-and not even a kiss to show for it.

One by one, others arrived at the finish line.

Jace spotted his rival approaching, a mocking curl at the edge of his lips.

“You lost.”

Mortimer snorted, shoving Selene toward Jace.

“Here-take her.”

Selene stumbled into Jace’s arms, but he recoiled like she was coated in poison, pushing her away with

contempt.

“What am I supposed to do with her? I never claimed her.”

Mortimer’s eyes narrowed, voice dripping with venom.

“We agreed-if I lose, Selene’s yours. If you lose, your mate’s mine.”

His gaze then locked onto Carmen-open, predatory-he whistled low and crude.

“Hey, beauty-what’s your name?”

Carmen didn’t flinch, didn’t spare him even a glance.

Mortimer’s face darkened, frustration bubbling over.

“Answer me, deaf or just dumb?”

Since learning Riley couldn’t hear, Carmen had grown fiercely protective of that word.

She spun around, eyes like twin blades of ice slashing at him.

“My name? What right do you have to know?”

Mortimer froze, then smirked with dark amusement.

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Chapter 250

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“Jace, this one’s got spirit. How ’bout you hand her over? You want Selene, right? Let’s trade.”

“Who the hell wants Selene? You think I’m some scavenger, collecting scraps?” Jace’s rage flared, face burning like wildfire.

He yanked Carmen behind him, shielding her like a wolf guarding his mate.

Then he shoved Selene back toward the man, voice low and fierce.

“Your woman’s your problem. I want no part of her. My mate? She’s worth ten thousand times more than that.”

Selene’s eyes welled with tears, vulnerability flickering behind her defiant mask.

“Jace... how can you say that?”

Jace rolled his eyes, voice sharp as fangs.

“Did you think I raced for you? Don’t flatter yourself.”

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1:16 pm DD

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